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100 entrevistas con Jesucristo en su segunda venida a la Tierra

María y José Ignacio López Vigil

ANOTHER GOD IS POSSIBLE

100 exclusive interviews with Jesus Christ in his second coming to Earth!

Maria e José Ignacio López Vigil

http://www.emisoraslatinas.net/

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Interview 01

THE SECOND COMING?

JOURNALIST It's about to happen here, in Jerusalem. They have confirmed there'll be a press conference.

CORRESPONDENT Mikes? Cameras? Everything ready?

WOMAN REPORTER Hurry up! He should be arriving soon!

RACHEL Stop pushing, for heaven's sake! … You people may be from BBC or CNN, but everybody has a right to be here, no? Or do you think you have exclusive rights?

JESUS My, what a lot of people… Shalom! Peace be with you!

RACHEL And who are you?

JESUS Well, let me ask you who are you? … You look a bit bereft of friends.

RACHEL It's just that these television people think they own everything…. I'm Rachel Perez, a reporter for Emisoras Latinas. And you? Are you from some Palestinian paper?

JESUS No… I'm coming from some distance and …

RACHEL Ah, you're here as a tourist… As you can see, everybody here has been waiting and waiting, and he still hasn't arrived…

JESUS And tell me, who are they waiting for? Who is supposed to be coming?

RACHEL Jesus Christ. They've announced his Second Coming to Earth, and you can just imagine … it's front-page news!

JESUS You don't say? And who made the announcement that he was coming?

RACHEL How do I know? Maybe some angel. I came on the first plane I could get… Let's see if I'm in luck and can record his words from here when he arrives…

JESUS Well … I *have* arrived. I am Jesus.

RACHEL You're who?

JESUS I'm Jesus. Jesus Christ, as you said.

RACHEL What do you mean? You're Jesus Christ, the one that all these people are waiting for?

JESUS Yes, my friend. Why don't you believe me?

RACHEL Because…, because…, because you don't….

JESUS I don't what?

RACHEL Well, you don't look like…. Jesus Christ.

JESUS And according to you, what does Jesus Christ look like?

RACHEL I don't know, because I've never seen him,… but … to begin with, you don't talk the way Jesus Christ would talk.

JESUS And how is Jesus Christ supposed to talk? [*in a deep voice*] Like this, with a voice like thunder?

RACHEL I don't really know… I'm not very religious, but …

JESUS I'm serious. I am Jesus, from Nazareth, the one these people are waiting for.

RACHEL Really?... But… but how do I know it's you, I mean, that you're Jesus Christ, … sir?

JESUS And how do I know that you are … what did you say your name was?

RACHEL Rachel, Rachel Perez, special correspondent for Emisoras Latinas.

JESUS How do I know that Rachel is Rachel? Trust in my word. I am Jesus.

RACHEL It's not a question of trust, but you just don't look like the Christ of the *King of Kings …* or the one of Zefirelli … or the one of Mel Gibson's *Passion.*

JESUS And who are those gentlemen?

RACHEL People who have made films about you.

JESUS Films?

RACHEL Movies, films… I'll explain it to you later. But are you absolutely sure you're Jesus Christ? You aren't pulling my leg, are you?

JESUS Yes, that's who I am.

RACHEL Jesus Christ, the son of the Virgin Mary? The one who lived here in Palestine two thousand years ago? The one on the cross, the one in the Bible, the one…?

JESUS Yes, the very same, but you're beginning to make me doubt it with all those questions!

RACHEL Well, then, I've been lucky indeed. I'm getting the breaking news. What luck to find you in the middle of this crowd of reporters! … Will you give me an interview, Mr. Jesus Christ?

JESUS Of course, Rachel, but let's get out of this crowd, because there's too much noise here, all right?

RACHEL Put me on the air, control… One, two… Yes?... Yes?... I've got him right here! Hello, friends of Emisoras Latinas. Thanks to our exceptional journalistic nose, we have succeeded in finding Jesus Christ in the middle of this multitude that has been waiting hours for him here on the esplanade of the mosques, in the very heart of Jerusalem. We'll be right back with you after this short break!

MUSIC

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INTERVIEW 01: BACKGROUND MATERIAL

Anxious … and with good reason

The "second coming" of Jesus Christ, which is mentioned in the gospels, was anxiously awaited by some of the first Christian communities. Saint Paul himself was convinced that the final day was coming soon (1 Thessalonians 4,13-18), but he had to admonish some Christians because their concern about the future was preventing them from dealing with other matters. For example, they weren't working, and were living with a futile impatience that tended to make them irresponsible (2 Thessalonians 2,1-7 and 3,6-12). Those were times when Christians were suffering great persecution, and the communities were anxiously awaiting the day of their definitive liberation. The final book of the Bible, the Apocalypse, was written in a similar context; its beautiful but sometimes terrifying symbolism about the end of the world was aimed at consoling the Christians who were suffering at the hands of Rome's imperial power.

Millenarianism yesterday and today

Christian expectation of the second coming of Jesus Christ is expressed in the words of the Creed: *He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.* The second coming of Jesus Christ may best be understood as a symbolic representation that helps to bolster our efforts to build a new and better world. But many preachers and many religious publications, both Catholic and Protestant, announce it today as something real and often even imminent. Not only does such preaching foster fear and anxiety, but it often presents the second coming as the only possible solution to the complex problems of humankind. In the year 1000, as the first millennium gave way to the second, many beliefs of this sort were common among the people,

and they gave birth to a movement called “millenarianism”. More recently, in the year 2000, at the beginning of the third millennium, the same kind of fright took hold again.

The end of the world, with date and all

Among the many people who have announced the imminence of the second coming of Jesus Christ, even giving an exact date, is the American minister and preacher William Miller, who headed a strong millenarian movement. His followers were expecting the end of the world and the second coming of Jesus Christ on October 22, 1844. When his prediction failed, some of his followers founded the Seventh Day Adventist Church, which today has spread throughout the United States and Latin America. A few years later the Jehovah’s Witnesses arose, with very similar ideas; they are now waiting for what they call “Armageddon”, the moment when Jesus Christ will return and take with him to heaven the 144 thousand persons who are the “chosen ones”. They also believe that Jesus Christ already returned to earth, although in an invisible form, in 1914.

Simply a literary device

In the programs of this series, “Another God is Possible,” the second coming of Jesus Christ is just a literary device for organizing reflections about Christianity, its origins, its dogmas, its practices, its beliefs, its essence. Those who listen to these programs or read these scripts may wonder: Where was Jesus Christ during the past two thousand years? Hidden? With God in heaven? Where did he come from? Such questions are asking for a logical and theological answer that the authors cannot supply. What we *can* do is try to imagine how Jesus Christ might today examine and evaluate what has been said and what has been done in his name during the last two millennia.

Interview 02

WHY IS JESUS COMING BACK?

RACHEL Here we are again, friends. I am your Emisoras Latinas correspondent Rachel Perez, and I'm broadcasting from a spot just south of the esplanade of the mosques, here in Jerusalem! Today we have with us none other than Jesus Christ, yes, Jesus Christ himself. He has been kind enough to conduct his first exclusive interview with us. Welcome to our world and to our network, Mr. Christ.

JESUS Thank you, Rachel.

RACHEL Master, I'm sorry I'm a bit overcome with emotion… I know that I'm the first reporter to interview you, and as you will understand…

JESUS Just take it easy, and ask whatever you wish… I myself am a little nervous… In my time we didn't have all these gadgets.

RACHEL Good, then… let's begin. Come closer to the microphone, please, master… The first question is obvious Is this really your second coming, the one so awaited by millions of believers around the world?

JESUS Yes, of course.

RACHEL But you had announced that there would be earthquakes and cataclysms when you returned. What happened?

JESUS No, what I said was that I would come in silence, without noise. Like a gentle breeze.

RACHEL What about the angels and the trumpets and you riding gloriously down on the clouds of heaven?

JESUS Where did you get that idea?

RACHEL From your biography, from the gospels! … Unless perhaps the evangelists were already practicing journalistic sensationalism back then. What do you think?

JESUS I really don't know what you're talking about…

RACHEL In any case, the prophecies are being fulfilled. Look at what's happening in the world hurricanes, earthquakes, droughts, wars….

JESUS So many calamities?

RACHEL Every day. Maybe you'll get to witness one of them. Not long ago, in Asia a tsunami wiped out tons of people in Asia. And in California they're waiting for the "Big One"… What can you tell me? Are these disasters warnings, or signs, that God is sending us?

JESUS I don't think so, because a father doesn't warn his children by sending them scorpions.

RACHEL Maybe I don't quite get what you're saying; do you mean these disasters somehow aren't related to this unexpected return of yours?

JESUS No, Rachel, I have not come to bring about any sort of disaster.

RACHEL Then, what have you come for, master?

JESUS Why do you keep calling me "master"? There is only one Master, the one in heaven.

RACHEL Well,… what should I call you? Jesus Christ?

JESUS Just call me Jesus. That's my name.

RACHEL Okay, then, … Jesus … Mr. Jesus, back to the reasons for your visit. Have you come to carry out the Final Judgment?

JESUS No, that's God's business. Only He knows the day and the hour.

RACHEL And so….?

JESUS After being away so long, I just want to know how things are going in this world, especially among those who claim to be my followers – a little like that master who distributed money among his workers and went off on a long journey … and then came back to see what they had done with it.

RACHEL Will you be with us for a while?

JESUS I'm not sure. I'm curious to know what people have done in my absence and in my name. But right now I need to be going.

RACHEL What do you mean, going? I have a hundred questions to ask you, and I've hardly asked you one…

JESUS Well, keep the other 99 for another moment. It's getting late, and we country folk go to bed early. Shalom, sister! Peace be with you!

RACHEL We'll see you tomorrow. … Radio listeners, this has been our first exclusive interview with Jesus Christ in his native land during this, his second coming… Incredible, incredible but true! For Emisoras Latinas, this is Rachel Perez in Jerusalem.

MUSIC

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INTERVIEW 02: BACKGROUND MATERIAL

The "master" returns

Jesus told the parable of the master who goes away and entrusts money to his workers for them to put to good use (Matthew 25,14-30 and Luke 19,11-27). The purpose of this parable, among other things, was to prick the conscience of the religious leaders of his time and warn them that God was going to make a reckoning of what they had done and what they had failed to do for His people. The first Christian communities understood this parable to be a call to responsibility. Now Jesus, in his "second coming", presents himself as the "master" who is coming back to see what has been done "in his absence and in his name".

The biblical catastrophes

In the popular imagination and in the preaching of many ministers and clergy, the "second coming" of Jesus is associated with catastrophes and cataclysms. This is due to a literal interpretation of the apocalyptic and eschatological texts that appear in both the Old and the New Testaments (see Daniel 12.1-13; Joel 2,1-11; Amos 5,1-20; Apocalypse 19,11-21).

The gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke present discourses of Jesus about the great catastrophe that is coming upon the world. Traditionally these discourses have been read as detailed descriptions of everything that was going to happen in the last times, and they are used to sow terror among simple people or to give unscientific explanations of the origin of the environmental disasters that are now occurring in the world.

The world's "natural" disasters are "social" ones

Although many people react to natural disasters with a sense of impotence, much as our ancestors reacted to epidemics like the plague, we should try to understand such disasters from a broader perspective: they are really "social" disasters. Using such a perspective, an important group of scientists has formulated the equation: R = T x V, which means: Risks = Threats multiplied by Vulnerabilities. The Risk that a catastrophe or disaster might occur – in the home, in the community, in the country, or on the planet – is the result of the Threats that exist, multiplied by our Vulnerabilities to them.

The disaster of resignation

Among our many human vulnerabilities (economic, social, technical, cultural, educational, institutional), scientists also include ideological vulnerability, i.e., resignation in the face of disaster. We are made especially vulnerable when we simply "resign ourselves" to disaster in either thought or

action, such as when we believe that an earthquake is “a test from God,” a hurricane is “a punishment from God,” or a drought or a flood is “a sign from God.”

More information about natural disasters and how they should be understood as social disasters can be found at: http://www.envio.org.ni/articulo/3085.

Interview 03

WHERE IS HE COMING FROM?

RACHEL Late-breaking news! Right up to the minute! … Jesus Christ, the long-awaited Messiah, has returned to Earth and is here among us, right by my side… Emisoras Latinas, through its exceptional journalistic contacts, has succeeded in bringing to you his very first words, which are now available on our Internet Web site…

JESUS And those people coming this way, who are they, Rachel?

RACHEL Reporters from other stations… and from television networks. They've finally found us.

JOURNALIST Hey, where were you, huh? … Are you the one they call Jesus Christ?

WOMAN REPORTER We've been waiting here since yesterday! All these people got up early to see you and hear? … Why did you hide from the press?

JESUS I haven't been hiding from anybody. What happened was…

CORRESPONDENT What are you doing over here in this corner? They have a special stage set up over there for you to speak. Don't you see it?

JESUS But since we're here already, why don't we just talk here?

JOURNALIST No way. There are people waiting for you on the platform the patriarch of Constantinople, ministers from all the Protestant denominations, a bunch of cardinals and bishops… Any time now the Pope will be arriving from Rome …

JESUS And who are all those people you mention?

CORRESPONDENT What do you mean, who are they? They're your representatives, the ones who are running your churches…

WOMAN REPORTER Tell me, Jesus Christ, how did you get here, in a space ship, or perhaps a UFO?

JOURNALIST Where are you coming from now?

JESUS From God. We always come from God.

CORRESPONDENT Where were you all this time? Hibernating like Walt Disney? In heaven? Hidden away in the cellars of the Vatican?

JESUS I was …. with God. We are always with God.

WOMAN REPORTER Someone said you were cloned from a drop of blood from the Shroud of Turin. Do you consider yourself a divine clone?

JESUS I don't know what you're talking about… I consider myself … a child of God.

JOURNALIST Please try to make your answers a little more concrete… Tell us, what have you come to do on earth?

JESUS Listen, my friends. Once there was a farmer who went out to sow. Some seeds fell on rocks, others fell on thorns…

WOMAN REPORTER Oh no! No cute parable, please! We have only fifteen seconds to close off our news report! Short answers, precise and concise, please. Something that will have an impact on our audience.

CORRESPONDENT Do you back the creation of an independent Palestinian state?

WOMAN REPORTER What is your position on abortion?

JOURNALIST What about U.S. imperialism and the problem of drug trafficking?

CORRESPONDENT Where is the Latin American left headed?

JESUS What is this, Rachel? An interrogation like Pontius Pilate's?

RACHEL That's how things are now, Jesus, some reporters are like vultures…

JESUS But we aren't carrion … Come on, let's go to Galilee!

RACHEL Yes, that'd be better…

JOURNALIST Hey, who's that young woman who's with Jesus Christ, huh?

CORRESPONDENT Maybe it's the new Mary Magdalene …

WOMAN REPORTER And what credentials does she have to be at the side of Jesus Christ?

JOURNALIST Jesus Christ? That's not Jesus Christ! That bearded guy looks like a terrorist of the Intifada!

JESUS Rachel, let's get out of here – we can walk to Galilee in three days.

RACHEL Three days! We can do it in three hours! … Now we don't have to go on foot, like in your time…

JESUS Really? Then how will we travel, on camel?

RACHEL On a kind of camel with wheels… I'll explain it to you afterwards. But why don't we go somewhere closer first? If we take a taxi, we can be in Bethlehem in a few minutes. What do you think?

JESUS Bethlehem.... where King David was born!

RACHEL And where you were born too, right? … Come on, follow me… [in reporter's voice] Reporting to you on the road to Bethlehem, in the company of Jesus Christ, this is Rachel Perez of Emisoras Latinas.

MUSIC.

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INTERVIEW 03: BACKGROUND MATERIAL

Another world, another God

This series of exclusive interviews with Jesus Christ is titled "Another God is Possible". Such a statement may shock people when they first hear it, but we can understand it in various ways. The famous motto of the 2001 World Social Forum, held in Porto Alegre, Brazil, was "Another World is Possible". This motto became popular among those who of us who behold the injustices and inequalities that prevail in the world today – wars, hunger, violence against women, violations of human rights – and who understand that another world needs to be created, one with a different ethics, and with values other than those of money and the market. Another world **is** possible. And it is necessary.

To make this "other world" really possible, the "God" – or the idea of God – that is preached, legitimized and defended by those who have made this world as unjust as it is must be questioned and rejected. For another world to be possible, the very idea we have of God needs to be transformed. "Another God" is urgently needed. In the message of Jesus of Nazareth we can discover the traits of that God we truly need in order to transform the world.

The authority of Jesus

The purpose of Jesus' "second coming" is to introduce us to this "other God" and to distance us from that "God" who does nothing to help us grow and be more responsible for our lives and our world. By calling upon the authority of Jesus, which in this series is simply a literary device, we wish to share with readers many ideas suggested to us by common sense and human compassion, and also many ideas that various liberating theological currents have been developing for some time now. We seek to recover the originality of Jesus' message and to question the dogmas, rites, traditions and history that have often obscured and distorted that message in the past.

Interview 04

BORN IN BETHLEHEM?

RACHEL Attention, studios!... Our mobile unit is now in Bethlehem, ten kilometers south of Jerusalem. We've come here with Jesus Christ, who, as we informed you in an earlier broadcast, has unexpectedly arrived in the world, even though his presence hasn't attracted much attention from the press so far. But Emisoras Latinas is on the story. Welcome again, Jesus, to our microphones.

JESUS Shalom, sister! Peace be with you!

RACHEL So tell me, Jesus, how do you feel returning to Bethlehem, your birthplace?

JESUS Why do you call it my birthplace?

RACHEL Well, because… because you were born here in Bethlehem two thousand years ago, weren't you?

JESUS I think you're mistaken, Rachel. I wasn't born here. I've never even been to this city.

RACHEL You've never been to Bethlehem?

JESUS No, this is the first time I've traveled through these hills.

RACHEL There must be some confusion because … everybody knows you were born here… Just look at the thousands of Christians who are lining up to enter into the Basilica of the Nativity, here on our left, built over the place where your mother gave birth to you.

JESUS Wherever did you get that story, Rachel?

RACHEL Where did I get it? It's there in your biography, in Luke's gospel. All our listeners know that story.

JESUS So it's in Luke, huh? … I can just imagine what Luke is up to. … You as a reporter will understand him perfectly.

RACHEL Yes, but explain it to me, please, because…

JESUS Look, Rachel, a thousand years before me, David, the most loved and admired king our people ever had, was born here in Bethlehem. In having me born here, that Luke fellow was surely trying to do me a favor by portraying me as a king, a new David.

RACHEL But what about the census of the emperor Caesar Augustus? What about Joseph and Mary, who came here riding on a donkey in order to register? Isn't that the way it was?

JESUS Well, as I recall, the Romans took that census in order to increase our taxes, but that was … I forget how many years after I was born. Luke no doubt knew that bit of history, and being an imaginative writer, he put it in his gospel.

RACHEL Then you mean… the evangelist lied?

JESUS I wouldn't put it that way. Luke must have been eager to preach the Kingdom of God. And in Bethlehem he found, you might say… a poetic place for me to be born.

RACHEL But don't you think the evangelist Luke went a little too far?

JESUS Could be, but the important thing is not where people are born, but where they work and where they struggle.

RACHEL So … where were you actually born?

JESUS In Nazareth, where else? That's why everybody knew me as Jesus of Nazareth.

RACHEL But what about the angels…, and the star…, and the magi?

JESUS Let's talk about that later, Rachel. You know what? I'm really curious to go into that church and listen to what the preacher is going to say … I hope his imagination is not as wild as Luke's!

RACHEL Friends, while Jesus Christ is entering the Basilica of the Nativity, we still have a lot of unanswered questions. If one evangelist made up the story of the birth in Bethlehem, what won't the others have done? The telephones of Emisoras Latinas and our Internet forum are open to you all. This is Rachel Perez, reporting from Bethlehem in Judea.

MUSIC

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INTERVIEW 04: BACKGROUND MATERIAL

The Roman census in Palestine

Jesus knew about the census that was taken around the time he was born. It was an instrument of control that Rome used throughout its dominions. The census taken in Israel, according to Luke, was ordered by Publius Sulpicius Quirinus, the Roman legate in the province of Syria. It had two stages: registration and collection. The first stage consisted of making an inventory or register of all persons and properties in the country. In the second stage, the corresponding taxes were levied on each

person, and systematic collection was begun. This second stage, which some researchers refer to simply as “the census”, seems to have taken place about six years after Jesus was born.

If such is the case, the birth of Jesus would have occurred during the first stage, when all persons and properties were registered. That census officially confirmed the submission of the people of Israel to the Roman Empire. As a result of the census Palestine formally became a province of Rome. When he was writing his gospel, Luke was especially interested in this historical and political event, since the journeys people had to make from one region to another because of the census gave him a way to explain the trip that Joseph and Mary made to Bethlehem. He was thus able to use this literary-theological device for his narration.

Jesus, “the one from Nazareth”

Only Luke and Matthew have Jesus born in Bethlehem. Neither Mark nor John mention it, nor do they have any stories at all about Jesus’ infancy and childhood in their gospels. Furthermore, they always refer to him as “Jesus of Nazareth”, which would make it appear that he was born there, since in those days family names as such did not exist, and the custom was to refer to people by their place of origin. There are other examples in the New Testament, such as Saul of Tarsus (Acts 9,1), Joseph of Arimathea (Mark 15,43) and Lazarus of Bethany (John 11,1). Mark’s gospel, the first to be written, refers explicitly to Nazareth as Jesus’ “homeland” (Mark 6,1), and Jesus himself states that Nazareth is “his own country” (Mark 6,4). Everybody knew Jesus simply as the “Nazarene”, which is another way of saying he had been born in Nazareth.

The lineage of David

By having him born in Bethlehem, the city of David, the most beloved king of the Israelites, Luke wanted to establish a relation between Jesus and the great king of Israel that was not only symbolic, but also familial. Luke and Matthew wanted to present Jesus as a direct descendent of David. Moreover, Matthew, who was writing for communities of Jewish origin, chose Bethlehem in order to present Jesus as the long awaited Messiah. By locating the birth there, he was showing that Micah’s prophecy (Micah 5,1-3) was being fulfilled in Jesus. Thus the evangelists were doing theology on the basis of history, but they were also writing history on the basis of the theology that they wanted to share with the communities they were writing for.

Bethlehem, “where the West was born”

Bethlehem, situated about 10 kilometers south of Jerusalem, was an important city when Jesus was born. Today it is a city governed by the Palestinian Authority, where Christians and Muslims live together. Very prominent in the city is the Basilica of the Nativity, built 1,500 years ago and still standing. It is one of the oldest Christian churches in the world.

Even though Jesus was not born in Bethlehem, the name of the city is forever linked to him and to what he has represented for the culture of all humankind. During the celebrations of the year 2000, this was expressed beautifully in the commemorative poster designed by the Palestinian Authority: *Bethlehem, where the West was born.*

Interview 05
THE 25TH OF DECEMBER?

RACHEL Emisoras Latinas is on the air again with Jesus Christ, here in Bethlehem, where thousands of pilgrims and tourists are flooding the streets and the markets. They're busy buying stars, wreathes, lights, candies, figures for the manger, camels made of caramel, gifts, gifts and more gifts …

JESUS What's the reason for so much festivity, Rachel?

RACHEL Well, the feast of the Nativity is coming soon.

JESUS What nativity?

RACHEL Yours, of course. What other one could it be?

JESUS What do you mean, mine? What are you talking about?

RACHEL Don't play dumb… Excuse me, Jesus, I didn't mean that, but only …

JESUS Really, I don't know what you're talking about.

RACHEL About December 25th, the Nativity, the anniversary of your birth. You've already told us that you weren't born here in Bethlehem, but don't tell me now that you weren't born on December 25th.

JESUS Well, I *will* tell you that I wasn't born on the 25th of December, Rachel.

RACHEL How's that? Jesus Christ wasn't born on Christmas?

JESUS No.

RACHEL Friends, the person we're interviewing continues to come up with surprises… And so, if it wasn't December 25th, when was it? Tell us the date of your birth.

JESUS Well, … The truth is I don't know. I have no idea.

RACHEL Your parents didn't tell you?

JESUS No, because at that time nobody remembered those dates or celebrated them.

RACHEL What about the year you were born?

JESUS Even less do I remember that. Nobody knew how old they were in those days.

RACHEL But … don't they say that you set out to preach when you were thirty years old?

JESUS They may well say that, but I personally don't know how old I was when I went down to the river to be baptized by the prophet John.

RACHEL Incredible! … So, with your permission, Emisoras Latinas is going to investigate what might be the origin of the tradition of celebrating Christmas. Excuse me one moment. … By cell phone I'm going to contact Nivio Alberto Lopez, a specialist in the ancient world…. Can you hear me, Don Nivio?

NIVIO Perfectly, Rachel. I've been listening to your interview. By all means, give a warm greeting to Jesus Christ for me.

RACHEL I'll do that. Now, please explain to us why the birth of Jesus is celebrated on December 25th.

NIVIO That date was originally a pagan feast.

RACHEL Pagan?

NIVIO Yes. You see, Rachel, in the northern countries during December the nights are very long. During the hardest part of winter in the times of the Roman empire, the people used to celebrate big feasts in honor of the sun, especially when the sun was beginning to overcome the darkness again and the days were becoming longer.

RACHEL And what does that have to do with Jesus Christ?

NIVIO Well, the first Christians saw Jesus Christ as a new Sun who brightened and warmed the world with his message of love and justice. So it was that some 300 years after the time of Jesus, a Pope named Liberius took advantage of those pagan feasts and declared that the principal day for celebrating them, the 25th of December, was really the birthday of Jesus Christ. That's how the tradition began, but the date itself is arbitrary. It was decided by the Pope in Rome.

RACHEL Thank you very much, Don Nivio. We return now to Jesus Christ…. So that is to say, you don't know exactly when you were born or how old you were at your baptism?

JESUS No.

RACHEL And don't you think it's a little … how to say it? … a little *strange* not knowing when you came into this world?

JESUS To the contrary. It seems to me quite fitting. That way, you can celebrate every day as if it were your first. And you'll always feel young!

RACHEL So to conclude you weren't born in Bethlehem, and you weren't born on December 25th. What remains, then, of Christmas?

JESUS The Sun remains, Rachel, that Sun which God makes to rise over us every day of the year.

RACHEL So, friends, with the bells of Bethlehem sounding behind me, this is Rachel Perez, reporting for Emisoras Latinas.

MUSIC.

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INTERVIEW 05: BACKGROUND MATERIAL

Without a date of birth

The date of Jesus' birth is not known, and there is no way of knowing it with precision. The reference that Luke's gospel makes to a census ordered by Rome brings us close to the year when it happened, but the exact month and day will forever remain unknown. Everything would seem to indicate that Jesus was born in the years immediately prior to the definitive annexation of Palestine to the Roman Empire, or very soon thereafter. Often the date 4 "B.C." is suggested. Rome ordered the census to be taken in Palestine around that time, though it is not known with certainty when exactly it took place or how long it lasted.

"It's better not to know one's age"

It may seem strange that Jesus would not know how old he was. However, the lack of such knowledge is very common in rural areas, even in recent times. The extraordinary text "The Papalagi" is a collection of the discourses given the Samoan chief Tuiavii of Tiavea to his Polynesian people, after a journey he made to Europe at the beginning of the 20th century. In one of the discourses Tuiavii gives the following reflection on the advantages of not knowing one's age:

Among the Papalagi (white people) not only the men, but also the women and even the small children, all know exactly how many times the sun and the moon have risen since the day that they saw the great light for the first time. This is so important in their lives that they celebrate the day at regular intervals with flowers and parties. Very often I have seen how people felt embarrassed for me, because they would ask me my age and I would begin to laugh since I didn't know. "But you have to know how old you are." So I just remained silent and thought: it's better for me not to know that. "How old are you?" means: how many moons have you been alive? Analyzing and counting in this way is full of dangers, because that way you find out how many moons people are accustomed to live. They then keep that in mind, and when a great many moons have passed, they say: "Now I must soon die." They become silent and sad, and in fact within a short time they in fact die.

Nivio López

Nivio López Vigil is an archeologist and an eminent illustrator of children's books. He has a wide knowledge of the cultures of the ancient world and is passionate about the ways people celebrate Christmas. For that reason he participates in the program, giving a succinct explanation of the historical origin of this date. His book "Twenty-five 25th's of December" examines the various ways that Christmas is celebrated in twenty-five countries around the world.

Sun worship

The choice of December 25th as the date for Christmas is linked to the celebrations of the Unconquered Sun (Sol Invictus) that were common in times of the Roman Empire. This cult originally came from Syria, but was imposed by the Roman emperors on their subjects about one century before the emperor Constantine declared Christianity the official religion of the empire.

Even though it contained elements of the worship of Baal and Astarte, worship of the Sun was essentially monotheistic: the Sun god was a synthesis of the attributes of all the gods that were known and adored in the ancient world. The cult of the Unconquered Sun was quite compatible with the millenarian mystery cult of Mithra, the Lord of Light, a religion of Mede and Persian origin that was very popular in Rome in those days. Besides adoration of the Sun, the cult of Mithra also included belief in the immortality of the soul, the resurrection of the dead and a future judgment; it even held celebrations in which the faithful shared bread and wine together. As a result, it fit quite well with the new Christian beliefs, which spread through the empire during a period when sun worship was quite extensive in all its territories.

From Saturday to Sunday and from Easter to Christmas

Three centuries after the time of Jesus, the emperor Constantine, who aimed to reinforce the political, religious and territorial unity of his empire, sought to harmonize all three religions: the Mithra cult, the worship of the Unconquered Sun, and Christianity. Once Constantine was "converted" to Christianity, he ordered that "the day of the Sun" (Sunday) be the weekly day of rest. Until that time the Christians, because of their Jewish origins, had recognized Saturday as a day of rest. Until that time, also, their main annual celebration was the Resurrection of Jesus, on coincided with the lunar feast day of Passover. The birth of Jesus was celebrated in only a few places, and on January 6th, the date in the Julian calendar that coincided with the winter solstice.

It was only starting in the third century that Christmas began to be celebrated on December 25th, which was the principal feast day for sun worship, the day of the Unconquered Newborn. On this day people celebrated the birth – or rebirth – of the Sun, because starting from the cold winter solstice the days became longer and gave more hours of light. In the middle of the fourth century Pope Liberius (352-366) made December 25th the definitive date for the celebration of the Birth of Jesus.

The Sun God

Sun worship existed in nearly all the cultures of antiquity because of the obviously great importance of the sun in all agricultural activities. In Egypt sun worship was central, and the pharaohs were considered sons of the Sun God. Sun worship was central also in the Inca Empire. The greatest

celebration of this religion was the Feast of the Sun, the *Inti Raymi* ("inti" means "sun" in the Quechua language), which even now continues to be celebrated in the city of Cuzco, Peru, every 24th of June, the time of the summer solstice.

The power of the Sun

Today we find ourselves confronted by the energy crisis, which has been provoked by our irrational and accelerated use of fossil fuels (petroleum and coal). These fuels, which were stored up by Nature during millions of years, have been squandered by us in the last two centuries. And so we once again turn our eyes toward the Sun, the inexhaustible source of energy and life for humankind. We do so with the certainty that solar energy will be able to help us avoid the catastrophe which is being caused by a combination of overpopulation and excessive consumption of non-renewable energy sources.

Interview 06
ANGELS, KINGS AND STARS?

RACHEL Emisoras Latinas now continues its broadcasts from Bethlehem, a city overflowing with pilgrims. We are with Jesus Christ, our special guest, who has returned to earth after so many years away. Once again we welcome you.

JESUS Thanks, Rachel. Shalom! Peace be with you!

RACHEL Now, tell us, Jesus, have you had time to get to know this city a little and to talk with some of the people here?

JESUS Yes, of course. I became friendly with a family that lives just over there, near the market… They told me about their problems…

RACHEL Did they recognize you?

JESUS No, they saw me as just another guy, just like one of them. That way there's more confidence.

RACHEL You told us in our earlier interview that you were not born in Bethlehem, nor were you born on December 25th. Is that right?

JESUS That's right. I was born in Nazareth, like all my family, like my brothers and sisters.

RACHEL We'll talk later about your brothers and sisters. Right now I want to discuss the angels.

JESUS The angels?

RACHEL The angels who sang "Glory to God in the highest" here in Bethlehem, or in Nazareth, or someplace in heaven….

JESUS Those angels must have been the hands of those midwives who helped my mother give birth…

RACHEL But were there angels singing or not on the day of your birth?

JESUS The thing is, you people take everything so literally, down to the last letter. For my people an angel is … good news, the messenger who bring good news.

RACHEL You mean it doesn't have little wings or…?

JESUS Neither wings nor feathers. As I told you, the real angels for women giving birth are the midwives. They're the ones who give them the good news that the child has been born healthy.

RACHEL And the three kings? What about them?

JESUS What kings?

RACHEL Well, Matthew, the other evangelist, wrote that when you were born, three magi came from the east, guided by a star, with gifts for you.

JESUS Rachel, it seems that Matthew also liked to dress things up, just like that fellow Luke. It would seem to me that he borrowed those magi from … let me think … yes, from the prophet Isaiah.

RACHEL How do you mean, he borrowed them?

JESUS Clearly, Matthew must have been recalling a text that our great prophet wrote about some kings who arrive from the east on camels, with gifts of gold and incense. They told me that story when I was a child … and I liked it.

RACHEL So, … no kings arrived when you were born, and they didn't bring you any gifts?

JESUS Believe me, around Nazareth, when I was born, no one ever saw the crown of any king.

RACHEL What about the star? Don't they say that a great comet appeared that year?

JESUS Comet? If my neighbors had seen a comet, they'd have run for their lives! People used to say that comets brought bad luck.

RACHEL Our listening audience must really be amazed, Mr Jesus Christ, … you want to take away even the star of Bethlehem.

JESUS No doubt Matthew mentioned the star in order to declare that God's light shines over all people, in the east and in the west, and that in God's Kingdom nobody is a foreigner.

RACHEL So there was nothing at all extraordinary? No star, no angels, no kings? At least the part about the mule and ox is true, isn't it?

JESUS The mule and the ox! … Now we're getting more down to earth, closer to the country parts where I was born… Do you want me to tell you how my mother Mary gave birth, how the women of the country gave birth in my time?

RACHEL Yes, of course. I'm extremely interested. And how about you, dear friends, those of you listening to our exclusive broadcasts? Where did Mary give birth, in a manger? Who helped her, who was at her side in such a decisive moment? Now Jesus Christ himself is going to tell us about it. Don't miss our next broadcast. From Bethlehem in Judea, this is Rachel Perez, reporting for Emisoras Latinas.

MUSIC.

ANNOUNCER Another God is Possible. Exclusive interviews with Jesus Christ in his second coming to Earth. A production of María and José Ignacio López Vigil, with the support of the Syd Forum and Christian Aid.

INTERVIEW 06: BACKGROUND MATERIAL

A tableau rich in symbolism

As he did in the passage about the Annunciation to Mary, the evangelist Luke included angels in his story of the birth of Jesus. He describes them as singing joyfully in the heavens and announcing peace to all people of good will. The other evangelist of the Nativity, Matthew, was interested in stressing that Jesus' message was not only for the Jewish people, but for all the peoples of the earth. For that reason, in his version of the story he recounts how certain men came to Bethlehem from the east; they are called "magi" to indicate that they belonged to another religion. For this metaphor he took his inspiration from several prophecies of the Old Testament, such as Isaiah 49,22-23 and 60,3-6. And to complete his beautiful tableau of the Nativity, he included in his story the prophetic star, like the one by which Balaam, a foreigner, announced the arrival of a great king (Numbers 24,15-19).

The angels, the magi and the star are all symbols, beautiful metaphors that illustrate the central message that the evangelists wanted to transmit to the first Christian communities: Jesus comes to carry out a marvelous mission, that of transforming the very limited idea of God that his own people, and all other nations as well, had at that time.

An idea of Francis of Assisi

During December, people in every Christian land set up "mangers" or "nativity scenes" in their houses, churches, offices and public buildings, using little figures that represent Mary, Joseph, and Jesus, as well as the shepherds, the kings and the angels. And of course the star is always there. It is a very old tradition, invented by Saint Francis of Assisi in the 12th century in the Italian city of Greccio. In the middle of the forest Francis built a little house of straw; he put there a mule and an ox, and between them he placed an image of the baby Jesus. At midnight on the 24th of December he invited the Franciscan friars and the neighboring farmers, who came carrying torches and singing hymns. Then they celebrated mass together. This was the beginning of the beautiful tradition of the mangers and the "midnight mass" at Christmas.

A fruitless effort

There have always been authors who have wanted demonstrate historically, rationally and scientifically all the events narrated in the Bible. For example, in order to prove that a spectacular star appeared in Bethlehem when Jesus was born, they speculate about a conjunction of planets that happened in those years and that might have produced the impression of a bright new star shining in the sky.

The Bible contains a great deal of historical data, but it is also replete with literary forms: metaphors, myths, epics true and false, popular tales, legends, oral traditions that grow larger with time, epigrams, collective fantasies, poetry…. When people attempt to apply scientific method to the biblical literature, then science loses, and the Bible loses as well. One of the recent and best-known authors in this lost cause was Werner Keller, a German Jew who became famous in the 1980s with his book, *The Bible as History*.

There are no pure religions

What is more interesting and instructive is knowing how the religious traditions of other peoples of those times exercised a real influence on biblical texts and on Christian traditions as well. Such influence shows us that, just as there do not exist any genetically "pure races", so neither are there any "pure religions". Indeed, the bigotry of racism is quite comparable to the intolerance of religious dogmatism.

The tradition of the magi, for example, was much influenced by the Mithra cult, which was basic to the religion of the Persians (who lived where Iran is today). Even the word "magi" reveals how strong the influence was, because the priests of Mithra were called "mogs", which in the West gave rise to the word "magi". What is more, according to ancient tradition the three "magi" who brought Jesus gold, incense and myrrh were called Melchior, Gaspar and Balthazar, which are names derived from Manucher, Garshasp and Bastavarai, who were three mythological monarchs of ancient Persia.

Interview 07
HOW DID MARY GIVE BIRTH?

RACHEL Hey, Master … Jesus! … Where have you been?

JESUS Shalom, Rachel!

RACHEL I've been looking for you all morning…

JESUS I was over there talking to some shepherds … They were telling me about the lands that have been taken away from them…

RACHEL Well, let me tell you, Jesus, many of my colleagues have been calling Emisoras Latinas, and they're interested in getting interviews with you… But, from what I see, you prefer to talk with the shepherds…

JESUS Not so. I'll speak with anyone who comes by…

RACHEL Well, then, keep speaking with me. …. Attention, studios. This is Emisoras Latinas live and direct from Palestine. We're talking with Jesus Christ about a topic we brought up before … Yesterday, Jesus, you began to speak about how your mother Mary gave birth, do you remember?

JESUS Yes, I remember. And what would you like to know?

RACHEL Well, just that. How did the Virgin give birth… That is, your mother… I understand that these are very personal questions, but …

JESUS Personal? Births in my time had nothing private about them. When the time came for a woman to give birth, the whole neighborhood heard about it. People would run to advise the midwives, the relatives…

RACHEL Since there were no hospitals, they'd naturally take care of the woman in her house….

JESUS Yes, that was the custom.

RACHEL And did they put her in a bed?

JESUS What do you mean "bed"? In my time women gave birth while standing.

RACHEL Ah, yes, of course, standing on their feet … I saw that on the Discovery Channel…

JESUS You know what they used to do? A cord would be strung from the roof so that the woman could grab a firm hold of it when the pains were beginning. Another woman would stand behind her and support her.

RACHEL And the midwife?

JESUS The midwife would be in front of her, seated between the mother's legs and helping her to breathe. Other women would be heating water and preparing ointments.

RACHEL And while all this was going on, what were the men doing?

JESUS Waiting. They just waited outside, sitting about and keeping silence. They used to send us little kids to look for fennel to mix with wine, and this would be given to the poor woman, holding onto the cord, pushing and pushing … Until the little head appeared and the baby was born!

RACHEL And then everybody returned to their homes.

JESUS Quite the contrary, Rachel. *More* people would come. The women would begin to sing and shout for joy for the newborn baby… The men would offer a toast… The midwife would wipe away the blood and cut the umbilical cord … it was quite a party!

RACHEL And your mother Mary gave birth like that?

JESUS Of course. How else would she have given birth?

RACHEL Well, I've read in some catechisms … that you came into the world … just as a ray of light comes through a pane of glass, without breaking it or staining it.

JESUS I'm not sure what you mean to say, Rachel.

RACHEL Ummmm … Well, … the question is whether your mother gave birth without breaking … the seal of her virginity.

JESUS Seal? What seal?

RACHEL That is to say … the hymen … Well, you must understand that it's a topic that's difficult for me…

JESUS No, Rachel, it's very simple. My mother gave birth the same way all women give birth. The waters broke and the seals broke, and she gave birth like anybody else.

RACHEL That means that …?

JESUS Don't complicate the matter, Rachel. The door of life is sanctified when it opens, not when it remains closed.

RACHEL But … but maybe it was that way during the birth … But we need to ask you what happened before and after and …

JESUS Each day has troubles enough of its own, Rachel. And each interview as well.

RACHEL Yes. Maybe it's best to close the program for today. But attention, all of you who are tuned in to our broadcast don't you all want to know more about Mary, the mother of Jesus? Or maybe you think that we reporters are guilty of acting more like paparazzi of the microphone? Give us your opinions. For now, reporting from Bethlehem, and covering the surprising second coming of Jesus Christ to earth, this is Rachel Perez, of Emisoras Latinas.

MUSIC.

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INTERVIEW 07: BACKGROUND MATERIAL

Giving birth: a community event

Among the apes and monkeys, our closest animal relatives, mothers can help to bring their own children to birth, by guiding them through the birth canal with their hands, cleaning out their nose and mouth so that they can breathe as soon as possible, and freeing them from their umbilical cord with a good bite. For that reason giving birth among the apes and monkeys is a solitary act.

In our species that is not the case: the mother cannot see the face of the baby, nor can she help it come out, because she might hurt it in doing so. Therefore, in all human cultures the women seek assistance when they are going to give birth; they don't go through the experience alone. Human birth is a social, communal activity, and it is an event that creates community. The traditional image of Jesus' birth in a solitary cave is neither historical nor realistic. It does not derive from the gospel story, but from the plastic figures that came much later, and it is an image that only reinforces the dogma of the "virginal birth".

Giving birth while standing: a human right

Throughout history, and in all parts of the world, women have not usually given birth to their babies lying down, but rather squatting down. Or else they stood up, holding on to a tree or a cord, or they were held up by other women. In the 17th century the French doctor Francois Mauriceau began to have women "lie down" when they were going to give birth. From that time on, people's homes gave way to hospitals, and midwives gave way to doctors. And because the doctors made themselves the main agents of the process, giving birth while lying down became a business, and a completely natural act was treated almost like an ailment.

In reality, the horizontal position is risky for giving birth. When a woman is lying down, her pelvis is flattened and the birth canal becomes rigid. Today many women are returning to the traditional practice and are experiencing the advantages of giving birth in an erect posture. The improved flow

of fluids helps to avoid infections, the baby's head passes through better, and the uterus dilates more rapidly. This position also improves the oxygen supply for the mother and the baby, produces fewer hemorrhages and makes the contractions more rapid. As a result, the birth is made easier, and the placenta is expelled more readily. The vertical position also diminishes the birth pangs. For this reason, there is ever more talk of a new human right: the right to give birth standing up.

Mary gave birth standing up

Mary must have given birth to her son Jesus standing up and assisted by other women. This moment was reproduced with moving images in the documentary film, "The Virgin Mary", produced by Alan Bookbinder and shown on the British television network BBC on December 21st, 2002. Also, the British psychologist and journalist Lesley Hazleton wrote a fascinating book called *Mary: A Flesh-and-Blood Biography of the Virgin Mother,* in which she describes how "Maryam" and other Galilean women gave birth in those times; this is the most suggestive and well-documented recreation of the history of Mary of Nazareth that we know of.

Like a "ray of sun"

The Catholic Church proposes as a dogma of faith that Mary was always virgin: before, during and after the birth of Jesus. By the 15th century a well-known Christmas carol referred to Mary's virginity by using the metaphor of a "ray of sun that passes through a pane of glass without breaking it or staining it". Centuries later this image was incorporated into the catechism of Pius X, and since then it has been popularized by countless catechists throughout the Catholic world. Regarding this the Protestants hold diverse opinions: some affirm the virginal conception of Jesus, others do not. Most Protestant churches do not believe in the virginal birth and believe that Mary had other children, not just Jesus.

Interview 08
FLIGHT INTO EGYPT?

RACHEL Friends of Emisoras Latinas, some of you may find it strange that our radio station has such exclusive contact with Jesus Christ in this, his second coming to earth. You may wonder why I'm the only one who's being allowed to interview him. What do you have to say about that, Master, I mean, Jesus? Don't you want to give statements to the press?

JESUS What's happening, Rachel, is that the other reporters, just like the Sadducees of my time, are probably looking for me in some temple, or on the clouds of heaven, or they're asking for miraculous signs… It's the same as always.

RACHEL They tell me that on the esplanade of Jerusalem there are still people waiting for you. And they're asking when you're going to arrive, and if you're going to speak with the Pope from Rome, with the President of the United States, with the European Parliament, with… with…

JESUS With you, Rachel. Aren't you the one interviewing me?

RACHEL Well, I'll take advantage of the new opportunity you offer me and … See that donkey? Precisely about that I wanted to ask you something.

JESUS About that little donkey?

RACHEL Not that particular one, no, but about the one on which your parents Mary and Joseph escaped just after you were born.

JESUS My parents escaped? Where did they escape to?

RACHEL You should know. Don't you remember when King Herod sent soldiers to kill all the boys less than two years of age that had been born in Bethlehem?

JESUS That murderer Herod killed big people, not children. He used to torture people, cut their throats… but it was the people who plotted against him.

RACHEL But when you were born, Herod became extremely frightened; he thought you were going to take his crown away from him.

JESUS What crown was I going to take from him, if I was still nursing at my mother's breast?

RACHEL Well, that's what Matthew's gospel says. Here it is, you can read it yourself.

JESUS Matthew again!... Matthew must have written that to spice up the story a bit.

RACHEL Spice it up? But why? To what end?

JESUS Just like in any story … my parents fleeing to Egypt, mounted on a donkey, in order to save me …

RACHEL But if it was just a story, why did he have you travel so far? He could have had you hide in some corner of Judea…

JESUS Ah, that's the point. Surely, Matthew must have read the story of that wicked Egyptian pharaoh who killed the Hebrew boys… Remember how the infant Moses was saved by being put in a basket that floated down the river?…

RACHEL That's the story line of the movie "The Prince of Egypt". I saw it.

JESUS That's the story line of the book of Exodus, Rachel. In my case, they couldn't have me float in a river because here in Palestine there's not much water… So, I see that they had me get on a donkey with my parents and flee into Egypt… And when Herod died, that was the makings of another story they had me return from Egypt as a way of presenting me as the new Moses, the great liberator.

RACHEL What a gross manipulation…

JESUS No, Rachel, it's a beautiful comparison. Why not?

RACHEL If I understand you well, then, you never traveled to Egypt, you never saw the pyramids…

JESUS No, I never saw those great marvels. And speaking of travels, where I *want* to go is to Nazareth! I'm really curious to visit the town where I was born and grew up and see what it's like nowadays. Perhaps we can travel on this donkey…?

RACHEL No, on donkey, no! How could you think of that? We can take another taxi, like the one that brought us here to Bethlehem. In a few hours we'll be in Nazareth. What do you think?

JESUS Okay, Rachel, you're the one in charge here.

RACHEL No, in Emisoras Latinas, the ones in charge are you, the public, a public that is always anxious to learn more. In Nazareth, I am certain, there will be new revelations awaiting us. Keep tuned to our broadcasts, and if you missed some of our earlier programs, you can always find them in the Internet at www.emisoraslatinas.net.

MUSIC.

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INTERVIEW 08: BACKGROUND MATERIAL

Three narratives that are not historical

When Jesus was born, the influence of the Romans was being felt ever more forcefully in Palestine, but the country was still being governed by King Herod the Great, who ruled for forty years with criminal notoriety. Matthew's gospel makes Herod responsible for the slaughter of children in Bethlehem after the arrival of in Jerusalem of the wise men from the east, and for the consequent flight into Egypt of Joseph, Mary and Jesus.

These three narratives do not respond to historical events. They are catechetical schemas aimed at presenting Jesus to the Christian communities as the new Moses. The texts seek out the parallels between Moses and Jesus: when Moses was born in Egypt, the pharaoh decreed the death of all the male Israelite children (Exodus 1,15-22), and when he was older, Moses had to flee to the south of Egypt, from where he later returned to free his fellow Israelites (Exodus 2,11-15).

We should read the Bible with the awareness that it contains many symbols, myths, legends and traditions of the Hebrew people; we should view all its texts, including those of the New Testament, within the timeframes and the cultural contexts in which they were written.

The Exodus: a metaphor

The central narrative of the Old Testament, which is at the heart of the faith and identity of the Jewish people, is that which recounts the liberation of the Israelites from the hands of the pharaoh, their journey through the desert and their arrival in the Promised Land under the guidance and leadership of Moses. The Exodus is also a metaphor, and its historical basis is being increasingly questioned. The Jewish archeologist Israel Finkelstein, director of the Institute of Archeology of the University of Tel Aviv, has shown this most convincingly in his book, "The Bible Unearthed" (Free Press, New York, 2002).

Revolutionary research

Finkelstein's research has revolutionized biblical archeology. According to his studies, the first five books of the Bible, called the Pentateuch (Genesis, Exodus, Deuteronomy, Numbers and Leviticus), are *an ingenious literary and political reconstruction of the genesis of the Jewish people, but they were created 1500 years later than we have always thought.* These texts were compiled during the reign of Josiah, who was king of Judea some seven centuries before Jesus lived; this occurred at a moment when Judea, the southern Israelite kingdom, was beginning to grow as a regional power, while Israel, the northern kingdom, was under the control of Assyria. The principal aim of these collected texts was to establish a unified nation founded on a renewed religion which proclaimed: one God (Yahweh), one king, one capital (Jerusalem) and one temple, that of Solomon.

Finkelstein's research shows that neither Abraham nor Moses were historical figures, that the Hebrew people did not escape from Egypt or cross the Red Sea or wander through any desert or conquer the

land of Canaan – because they were already there in Palestine thousands of years before, living from herding and agriculture.

How the Exodus "was born"

This is the way Finkelstein describes the elaboration of Exodus and the rest of the books of the Pentateuch:

Toward the end of the 7th century before Christ there was unprecedented spiritual ferment and intense political agitation in Judea. A coalition of court functionaries was responsible for the composition of an epic saga made up of a collection of historical narratives, memories, legends, popular tales, anecdotes, predictions and ancient poems. This masterpiece of literature – half original composition, half adaptation of earlier versions – went through modifications and editing before coming to serve as the spiritual foundation for the descendents of the people of Judea and for countless communities around the world. The objective was religious. The leaders of Jerusalem harshly condemned even the slightest expression of veneration of foreign deities, which were accused of being the cause of the misfortunes that the Jewish people was suffering. They undertook a campaign of religious purification and ordered the destruction of all local sanctuaries. Starting from that moment, the temple that dominated Jerusalem had to be recognized as the only site of legitimate worship for the whole people of Israel. Modern monotheism was born out of this innovation.

Interview (in Spanish) with Israel Finkelstein at "Periodista Digital", as of 31 January 2007: http://www.periodistadigital.com/religion/object.php?o=284614

Interview 09
BROTHERS AND SISTERS OF JESUS?

RACHEL Friends of Emisoras Latinas, our microphones have moved to Nazareth, in Galilee, a city that today has some 60 thousand inhabitants and much commerce… We find ourselves in the monumental Basilica of the Annunciation, and once again we have with us the protagonist of this story, Jesus Christ, in his second coming to Earth. Tell your first impressions, Master…

JESUS I've already told you not to call me "master". Remember that we are all…

RACHEL Yes, yes, you already told me several times … I'm sorry, it's just habit. Good, this basilica is built on the site of the house of the holy family…. Down below there we can see the ancient walls… Jesus, do you recognize them?

JESUS Well,… with so many candles and so much marble… I'm trying to make out … Yes, I think that's where we used to play when we were kids… This was a narrow little street … Yes, I remember, the way out to the valley was right here…

RACHEL What games did you play?

JESUS Pulling the dog's tail … We played with a ball made of rags… Also we used to play at hiding from the Roman soldiers … And we played another ball game called the mill, which was a lot of fun… My brother James always beat me…

RACHEL Your brother James?

JESUS Yes, James. Joseph also used to play with us, but not little Simon or Jude – they were still too small.

RACHEL You mean to say, those were your cousins?

JESUS What do you mean, my cousins? My *brothers*. I had four brothers and two sisters.

RACHEL Are you referring to the ones mentioned in the gospels? … Because they always explained to me that the Greek work "adelphos" means not only brothers, but also cousins…

JESUS I don't know about those Greek words, but those were my brothers.

RACHEL Maybe you mean step-brothers, sons of an earlier marriage of Joseph….?

JESUS How could they be from an earlier marriage if my father was very young when he married my mother? In those times people got married at an early age…

RACHEL Well, then I don't understand anything. Everybody knows that you were the only son of Mary.

JESUS No, I was the firstborn. I was the oldest, yes. But then James was born, then Joseph, Esther, little Simon, who was a rascal, Jude, and finally my younger sister, Benjamina.

RACHEL They were all children of Joseph … and Mary?

JESUS Of course. Of who else could they be?

RACHEL You have really knocked us out with these statements…

JESUS What do you mean, knocked out?

RACHEL Well, that's an expression from a game that you aren't familiar with, and which you certainly wouldn't like, boxing … But let's just say that you leave us overwhelmed.

JESUS My mother was the one who was overwhelmed. Imagine, bringing up six kids, seven including me… And my father Joseph, as hard as he slaved away, never earned enough to feed so many mouths. And then there was Granny Anna and uncle Mike.

RACHEL Let's leave your granny and your uncle aside for now and return to your brothers and sisters. So James and Joseph and all the others that you mentioned were your full brothers and sisters?

JESUS Yes.

RACHEL Are you aware of how serious such a statement is?

JESUS No, I'm afraid not.

RACHEL The thing is, if they were your brothers and sisters and not your cousins, then the virgin was … not so virginal. … I'm extremely confused.

JESUS But why, Rachel? What's wrong with having a family? God created life. We are the image and likeness of God when we create life, not when we remain sterile.

RACHEL But… that is … We'll have to continue discussing these matters with you, Jesus. Because, frankly, to say that we're overwhelmed would be an understatement… But, thinking it over, what really changes if Jesus did have brothers and sisters? Does that really change anything in his message? What do *you* think, esteemed audience of Emisoras Latinas? This is Rachel Perez, reporting from Nazareth in Palestine.

MUSIC.

ANNOUNCER Another God is Possible. Exclusive interviews with Jesus Christ in his second coming to Earth. A production of María and José Ignacio López Vigil, with the support of the Syd Forum and Christian Aid.

INTERVIEW 09: BACKGROUND MATERIAL

Nazareth yesterday and today

Nazareth was an unknown corner of the land of Israel, never mentioned in the Old Testament or by any other chronicler or historian of antiquity. In Jesus' day it was a small village where about two dozen families lived. Since it was situated on a steep slope, the farmers used to make their houses by digging into the hillside. Today, because of the influence of Christianity, Nazareth is the capital of Galilee. It is the Israeli city with the largest Arab population, some 60 thousand inhabitants, of whom two-thirds are Muslim and the rest Christian.

The most visible building of contemporary Nazareth is the modern Basilica of the Annunciation, built over stone walls that since the fourth century have been venerated as the remains of the cave in which Mary and her family lived. Also preserved in Nazareth is the spring which has supplied the village with water from time immemorial, the same one where Mary would have gone to fetch water. The well is now situated inside a small Greek Orthodox church that is dedicated to the archangel Gabriel.

Origins poor and plebeian

There exist some present-day currents of thought, influenced by the values of neo-liberal culture (competition, profitability) and those of the religious spirit which serves it (prosperity, success), which seek to present Jesus of Nazareth as a spiritual master who came from an undefined "middle class"; they go so far as to propose such unlikely ideas as that the first disciples were "fishing entrepreneurs".

The weight of historical and cultural data of his time leads us to understand that Jesus was a Galilean peasant from an extremely poor background. He was also a man with great charisma; he was an itinerant preacher who with his passionate speech appealed to poor people, the sick, the women and all the other marginalized people of his day. From among those poor, dispossessed people came the men and women who were Jesus' disciples. Fishing, for example, was at that time the labor of very poor people, and fishermen were discriminated against, since in that culture they were considered impure for being constantly in contact with the forces of evil, which were thought to dwell in the depths of the seas and the lakes.

The historical Jesus

Since the 19th century there been a great deal of historical research into the ancient Christian sources to see what they reveal about the man who was Jesus of Nazareth. The studies seek to distinguish between those traditions that go back to the historical Jesus and those which were added later on for

theological and catechetical reasons. These latter are traditions that were created by the first Christian communities to express their experience of the Christ of faith.

Among the many studies that attempt to give the most accurate possible portrayal of the historical Jesus are those by John Dominic Crossan (*The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant*, HarperCollins, 1992) and those by John P. Meier (*A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*, Yale, 1991).

With names and all

All four gospels speak at one time or another of the “brothers” of Jesus, always using the Greek word “adelphos”, which etymologically means “from the same womb” (Matthew 12,46-47; Mark 3,31-32; Luke 8,19-21; John 2,2). The gospel of Matthew (13,53-58) even gives the names of Jesus’ four brothers: James, Joseph, Jude and Simon, and mention is made also of his sisters. In Luke 2,7 we read that Jesus was the “first-born” son of Mary, not the “only-born”; the implication is that Mary had other children.

The concern to deny that Mary had other children appeared in the fourth century, when Saint Epiphany held that these brothers and sisters of Jesus were children of an earlier marriage of Joseph. One century later Saint Jerome, the author of the Vulgate (the Latin translation of the Bible), developed the thesis that these were not really Jesus’ brothers and sisters, but his cousins. This position then became common in the entire Catholic world, even though most Protestant churches accept that Jesus had siblings.

Jesus’ family

In 2005 BBC television broadcast an interesting documentary called “Jesus’ family”, in which the well-known genealogist Tony Burroughs analyzed Jesus’ genealogical tree. He conjectured about what Jesus’ large family might have been like, and he brought out well the influence that his brothers and sisters could have had on the initial diffusion of Jesus’ message among the people of Galilee and Judea.

Interview 10
WHAT WAS MARY LIKE?

RACHEL The microphones of Emisoras Latinas are still here in the Basilica of the Annunciation, in Nazareth of Galilee, as we continue with our special coverage of the second coming of Jesus Christ, born and bred right here, as he himself has told us. And I want to tell you, Jesus, that we have received many calls from people who heard our last report on your family and who were … just as surprised as I was. They've been constantly asking me to interview you further on this thorny subject.

JESUS Well, I don't know what's so thorny about it … Anyway, Rachel, just ask me anything you wish.

RACHEL Tell us, Jesus, was it here, in this place, where your mother received the visit of the angel and humbly accepted her destiny?

JESUS Why do you say humbly?

RACHEL Well, your mother Mary is a universal model of humility, obedience, submission to God's will…

JESUS Really, Rachel, I don't know what person you're describing, but it doesn't sound like my mother. She was a spunky woman.

RACHEL Spunky?

JESUS She had a lot of spirit. You know how the country women of my land are… Mary never let herself be cowed by anybody. Not even by Joseph. Not even by me. Want me to tell you something?

RACHEL Yes, Jesus, tell us, tell our audience…

JESUS When I first felt God's call, then the problems began at home. My brothers, who were already grown up, didn't understand, and my mother even less.

RACHEL That can't be, because Mary knew God's will concerning you from the beginning.

JESUS Just listen, Rachel. Once I was in Capernaum, trying to organize the first group and get our movement going. The house was full of people, and someone told me Jesus, they're looking for you outside. Who's looking for me? Your mother and your brothers. And what do they want? That you stop this craziness now and return to Nazareth. And imagine, the most obstinate of all was my mother.

RACHEL And what did you do?

JESUS I challenged them. I spoke up loud so they could hear me Who is my mother and who are my brothers? Those who support the plan of God and don't disrupt it!

RACHEL And what did they do?

JESUS They were furious. But later, little by little, with time, they began to understand. They changed. My brothers and my mother eventually accompanied me wherever I went. They also entered into the craziness of God's Kingdom.

RACHEL Your mother prayed a lot, didn't she?

JESUS Not a lot. But when she prayed, she did it well.

RACHEL What was her favorite prayer, the Hail Mary?

JESUS What prayer is that? … No, she used to say an ancient prayer that I heard her recite many times "My soul magnifies the Lord, because he has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted the humble folk. He has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty." Yes, I remember, that's the way she used to pray.

RACHEL But more than a prayer, that sounds like a revolutionary proclamation.

JESUS As I was telling you, my mother was a fighter.

RACHEL Everything you've told us is fine. … But what our audience wants to hear more about is the angel.

JESUS What angel?

RACHEL Gabriel, the one who announced to Mary that she would conceive virginally…

SACRISTAN Come now, come now, you two… You have to leave. We're going to close the basilica.

JESUS I think they're trying to get us out of here, Rachel.

RACHEL Well, then let's take a commercial break and .. Stay with us, friends! This is Rachel Perez reporting from Nazareth for Emisoras Latinas.

MUSIC.

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INTERVIEW 10: BACKGROUND MATERIAL

Forgotten narratives

The stories recounted in the gospel of Mark (3,20-21) and in that of Luke (8,19-21) have been quite forgotten in Christian tradition, but they are there to remind us of the conflict that existed between Mary and Jesus when he started out as an itinerant preacher and popular leader. The stories also show us that, just like her son Jesus, Mary also went through a process in which she became gradually aware of her responsibility as the mother of that exceptional man whom the people were following with so much hope and passion.

The Magnificat

In Luke's gospel (1,46-55) appears the famous prayer or canticle recited by Mary: *My soul magnifies the Lord, because he has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted the humble folk.* It is commonly known as the "Magnificat" because of its first word in Latin. This canticle was inspired by the song of Anna, mother of Samuel, the last judge of Israel (1 Samuel 2,1-10) and by other expressions found in the psalms and the prophets.

The Church of the Visitation is one of many churches and convents built in memory of John the Baptist in Ain Karem, a small town in the mountains of Judea, situated about 7 kilometers from Jerusalem and considered to be John's hometown. In the cloister of the church the verses of the "Magnificat" are translated in many languages and presented in mosaic form.

An image that is detrimental for women

A powerful current of feminist theology is currently asking some very hard questions about the personal attributes of Mary, as they have traditionally been described in the Catholic Church. One of these theologians is Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, who has written many books, among them *Jesus: Miriam's Child, Sophia's Prophet* (1994) and *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (1984). Fiorenza indicates three ways in which harm is done to women by preserving that traditional image of Mary and making it the center of devotion to the Mother of Jesus: first, virginity is stressed to the detriment of healthy sexuality; second, maternity is made out to be the supreme ideal of femininity; and third, obedience, humility, passivity and submission are presented as the cardinal virtues of women.

According to the theologian Fiorenza: *Mary is preached to women as the humble servant of God, pure and self-effacing, the patient mother laden with affliction. She is presented as the model that should be imitated, even though her example is far beyond our reach. Furthermore, Mary, seen as the beautiful virgin and merciful mother, is often just an expression of that masculine desire for the "eternal feminine", now projected onto heaven.*

An extraordinary book

Her name is Maryam. It is a name so common in her time and place that at the cry of "Maryam" it is likely that one out of every three women would turn around… No matter what religion we profess – or

abjure – we date our checks, bills, e-mails, journals, weather reports, history books, birthdays and anniversaries in keeping with an event that happened in the Near East two thousand years ago: the date when Maryam gave birth. … How is it possible, then, that we know so little about her?... Each new image of Mary has removed her further from the reality of Maryam. … This is what I seek to do with this book: restore Maryam's world and create it again in its wholeness. My aim is to give Maryam back to herself, beginning with her real name. I want to restore her strength and her intelligence, and see her as the polyfaceted human being that she was, before being converted into an icon: she was a country woman, a healer, a nationalist, a mother, a teacher, a leader. And yes, a virgin, although in a sense that we forgot long ago. … There was nothing meek or docile about her. This woman emerges as a person who is much more that what we have till now allowed her to be: a strong woman, talented and wise, who actively chose her role in history and lived it intensely.

These are some of the ideas that appear in the introduction of the extraordinary book written by the British psychologist and political journalist Lesley Hazleton, *Mary: A Flesh-and-Blood Biography of the Virgin Mother* (Bloomsbury, 2005). The book's subtitle describes it well: "An investigation to discover the woman who is hidden behind the myth". Indeed, an infinite number of theology texts have idealized Mary, but very few have attempted to discover the reality experienced by that girl, that lass, that woman. This is the most interesting and bold study we know of, and it is also the best documented.

Interview 11
THE ANNUNCIATION TO MARY?

PRIEST: *The Angel of the Lord declared unto Mary.*

FAITHFUL: *And she conceived by the Holy Spirit.*

PRIEST: *Behold, the handmaid of the Lord.*

FAITHFUL: *Be it done unto me according to your word.*

RACHEL: Once again we are transmitting from the Basilica of the Annunciation, in the center of Nazareth. We have with us, as in our previous broadcasts, Jesus Christ himself, during his second coming to earth. Jesus, do you hear what the faithful are praying and singing?

JESUS: Yes, I got up early today, and I have heard this prayer several times.

RACHEL: They are the words spoken by the angel Gabriel when he visited your mother Mary right here, in this sacred place, two thousand years ago. If you would permit me…, can I get right to the point?

JESUS: By all means.

RACHEL: Mr. Jesus Christ, whose son are you?

JESUS: I'm my mother's son, just like everybody.

RACHEL: Yes, that much we already know. The problem is with your father. I want you to give me a straightforward answer me: are you the son of God, yes or no?

JESUS: Yes, of course I am.

RACHEL: [sighs loudly] I feel great relief at hearing those words. And I'm sure many of our listeners do as well.

JESUS: But you already knew that, Rachel. Life is a gift of God. We are all sons and daughters of God. You are also.

RACHEL: Wait now, let me see … Maybe I did not express myself well. I was referring to … whether you were born by the power and the grace of the Holy Spirit.

JESUS: Of course I was. The Spirit of God blows over all the waters.

RACHEL: I'm going to be more explicit. Was it the Holy Spirit that … impregnated Mary?

JESUS: How do you mean? … God does not have sperm. God does not impregnate women.

RACHEL: Let me ask the question another way: how did Mary become pregnant? Was it a gynecological wonder? Or maybe a case of parthenogenesis?

JESUS: Partheno-who? I don't know what those words mean.

RACHEL: That is, the way certain flowers reproduce themselves.

JESUS: In my language, Nazareth means "flower", … but I never heard of any Nazarene women becoming pregnant by themselves.

RACHEL: We don't know how he did it, but God realized an extraordinary miracle in the womb of your mother Mary.

JESUS: Yes indeed, the miracle of life. Every mother is amazed at this marvel.

RACHEL: I'm referring to the miracle of her being a virgin and a mother at the same time.

JESUS: Rachel, don't look for three humps on a camel. If God is able to do things easily, what's the sense in making them complicated? Don't you see?

RACHEL: What do you mean by that?

JESUS: My father Joseph knew my mother Mary, and I was born of that union.

RACHEL: Am I hearing well or …. ? Are you aware that what you are saying is a heresy, … perhaps the worst of all heresies?

JESUS: But … nobody can be a heretic about himself! Don't I know how I was born?!

RACHEL: But, then, please, what's left of the virginity of the virgin? Where is the angel Gabriel, the "Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you, blessed are you…"?

JESUS: You know what, Rachel? I'm going to treat you to some fresh dates.

RACHEL: What's that you said?

JESUS: Come along, outside here there's a market …

RACHEL: Let's leave the jokes for another moment …

JESUS: The jokes, fine, but the hunger, no. Come with me, and we can continue conversing. Maybe outside this church you'll understand things better… Come, follow me!

RACHEL: Wait, I have to sign off from this interview … Reporting from Nazareth for Emisoras Latinas, this is Rachel Perez.

MUSIC.

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INTERVIEW 11: BACKGROUND MATERIAL

A saga of miraculous births

The passage about the annunciation in Luke's gospel is generally taken as an historical account which gives a basis for the dogma of Mary's virginity. This text, however, finds its literary inspiration in several ancient prophecies, such as Zephaniah 3,14-18; Isaiah 7,14 and 9,5. Throughout the Old Testament we are told of children who were born in a marvelous or "miraculous" fashion, as a gift of God for their mothers, who were sterile or very old and no longer had hopes of giving birth. Some examples are Isaac (Genesis 18,9-14), Samson (Judges 13,1-7), and Samuel (1 Samuel 1,1-18); in the New Testament we find the same regarding John the Baptist (Luke 1,5-25). By giving such wondrous accounts of the origins of these great men, those who told of their lives and deeds wanted to emphasize that they were not only begotten by their parents, but were also a special gift of God for the people.

The dogma of Mary's virginity

In the year 649 the Lateran Council proclaimed that Jesus was conceived "absque semine ex Spiritu Santo" (without semen, by the Holy Spirit). Many centuries later, on August 7, 1555, an Apostolic Constitution declared the dogma of Mary's virginity with these words: *By God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and by our apostolic authority we correct those who perchance affirm that Jesus Christ was not conceived by the work of the Holy Spirit, but like other men … or who affirm that the Blessed Virgin Mary is not the true Mother of God and that she did not remain forever perfect in her virginal integrity … before Christ's birth, during the birth itself and perpetually after His birth.*

The "scientific" explanation of the dogma

Using the new discoveries of science, some dogmatic theologians attempt to modernize and explain the "mystery" of the conception of Jesus with reasoning of this type:

Since Jesus was male and therefore had XY chromosomes, then in order for the Virgin Mary to conceive him, the miracle had to be that she formed from her ovum, with its own XX genetic message, a diploid zygote with 46 chromosomes, one of whose X chromosomes underwent a miraculous mutation and became a Y chromosome.

Whatever the nature of the miracle, these “theologians” hold that the dogma allows us to believe that all the genetic material of Jesus came exclusively from the “Most Holy Virgin.” Out of a vicarious feeling of shame, we decline to name the author of this nonsense.

The perversity of this dogma

The dogma of Mary’s virginity and the attempts to explain it and justify it “scientifically”, theologically or even metaphorically, are the expression of real contempt for the female body and for sexual relations, but especially for women’s sexuality.

Saint Augustine was one of the theologians of antiquity who, starting in the fourth century, forged a strong link among these three ideas: the sinfulness of sex, the virginal birth of Jesus and the superiority of virginity over sexual relations. In her book, *Alone of all her sex: the myth and the cult of the Virgin Mary* (1976), British historian Marina Warner analyzes in depth the perversity of the theological arguments which are summed up in the statement, “the woman is uterus, and the uterus is evil.”

Interview 12
VIRGIN MARY?

RACHEL Our signal got interrupted for a few minutes… But once again we are in contact with our audience, which finds itself rather perplexed by some statements made by our special guest, Jesus Christ. Now we continue our interviews with him.

JESUS It seems that you want to continue asking me about my mother…

RACHEL Yes, of course, and please pardon me, but I've done some research for this interview. In the Bible I found definitive proof that Mary was a mother without ceasing to be a virgin.

JESUS Is that so? … And where did you find it?

RACHEL In the book of the prophet Isaiah. Listen "Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Emmanuel." Isaiah 7, 14.

JESUS But my name is not Emmanuel, it's Jesus.

RACHEL The problem is not the boy's name, but the virgin who brought him forth…

JESUS Well, I don't know, but… but it seems to me that you're going in the wrong direction.

RACHEL How do you mean wrong direction?

JESUS Why don't you ask that friend of yours that you called the other day?

RACHEL No, not that one, but a woman I know. … Here, I have a telephone…. Let me see… I'm going to call Ivone Gebara*, a very serious Brazilian theologian… Hello?

IVONE Yes, hello?

RACHEL This is Rachel Perez of Emisoras Latinas calling. I would like to bother you about a theological matter. The prophet Isaiah spoke of a virgin giving birth. Is that true or false?

IVONE Well, in fact, the word the prophet used was not "virgin", but "young girl". Later on some translators changed that from "young girl" and wrote "virgin" instead.

RACHEL The translators of the Bible changed the word?

IVONE Yes. With translations that sometimes happens.

RACHEL But Matthew in his gospel takes that prophecy…

IVONE True, but Mark's gospel, which is older than Matthew's, doesn't even mention it. And Paul, in all the letters he wrote, never mentions anything about virgins giving birth. If such a spectacular thing had really happened, I don't think they would have neglected to mention it, do you?

RACHEL Well, then, I'm completely lost…

IVONE It's quite easy to understand, Rachel. In ancient times many famous men, in order to make them even more famous, were said to have been born of women impregnated by gods. They said that of Confucius, Zoroaster, and the Buddha, all of whom were founders of other religions. Their followers claimed that they were born of virgins, and in that way they divinized them.

RACHEL And so you say they did the same thing with Jesus Christ?

IVONE The very same thing.

RACHEL Well,… many thanks for this information, Ivone Gebara.

JESUS Do you see what I was saying, Rachel? It's a phony coin.

RACHEL But then… that business of the angel announcing to Mary … Is that a legend too? You were born like…, like…

JESUS Just as you were born, just as all of us are born, from a man and a woman. What evil is there in that?

RACHEL There's nothing evil. But…

JESUS I'm going to tell you something that happened to me once in Capernaum . I was talking to some people, announcing the Kingdom of God, and a woman in the crowd shouted out "Blessed the womb that bore you and the breasts that nursed you."

RACHEL A fine tribute to your mother.

JESUS Well, I paid her an even better one. I said "Don't bless the womb or the breasts. Bless the spirit of that woman who heard God's word and kept it in her heart."

RACHEL Therefore …?

JESUS Rachel, the word of God is a seed that is sown in the spirit, not the flesh. God's word was sown in the spirit of my mother Mary and in the spirit of those who fight for justice. Do you want some miracle greater than that?

RACHEL What I want is… for our audience to express their opinions. If Mary wasn't a virgin… what becomes of our faith in the Virgin Mary? Tell us what you think. Reporting from Nazareth for Emisoras Latinas, this is Rachel Perez.

MUSIC.

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INTERVIEW 12: BACKGROUND MATERIAL

Virginity: an ancestral lunar symbol

Virginity is an ancestral symbol which humankind first associated with the lunar goddess, who was considered both virgin and mother, just like the moon. She was born of herself, without need the help of any external agent. She was life, and she engendered life by herself and from herself. She was light and produced light. This lunar virgin goddess was a virgin because she had within herself the ability to become fertile and reproduce. This understanding of "being virginal" had nothing to do with sexual "purity" as Christian culture has proclaimed it for centuries through dogmas, rites and traditions.

This ancestral image of symbolic virginity can be seen in the ancient traditions of all the world's peoples. Since it is a heritage of a universal human spirituality, it is naturally present also in the texts of the Bible.

Exceptional men

During the early centuries of our era Christianity had to compete with other ancient religions, and it borrowed many elements from them. These religions often had stories about extraordinary, exceptional, exemplary men who had been born of "virgins". It was one way of showing the special and spectacular character of their mission and their message. Atis was born of the Virgin Nana. The Buddha was born of the Virgin Maya, Krishna of the Virgin Devaki, Horus of the Virgin Isis. Mithra and Zoroaster were also born of virgin mothers. The Mexican god Huitzilopochtli was similarly born of a virgin.

Virginity in the Bible

In the Hebrew culture fertility was valued quite highly, and virginity – which supposed sterility – was seen as a calamity (see Ecclesiasticus 42,10). Therefore, assuming that the Hebrew word "almah" was later mistranslated as "virgin" instead of "young girl", we should seek the real meaning of Isaiah's prophecy (7,14) and of Luke's narrative (1,26-38) on the spiritual-literary-symbolic plane, and not on the material-gynecological level. Furthermore, we should not presuppose that virginity is a superior state, one that is more perfect and more sacred than maternity.

The virginity of Mary

To the degree that the successive Christological dogmas kept divinizing Jesus, the tendency of theologians was to surround him, right from his origins, with wondrous and extraordinary circumstances. At first, Christian doctrine made reference only to his virginal conception in Mary's womb. Later on, it was felt necessary to insist on Mary's virginity *during* Jesus' birth, and also on her never having sexual relations even after his birth.

Some Church Father wanted to go even further, proposing that Mary herself had been conceived virginally in her mother's womb. Thus, unlike all other human beings, Mary would not have been born of sexual relations between her parents, who are known to tradition as Joachim and Anna. Other Church Father wanted to posit even more cases of virgin births, so they investigated the theological possibility of a chain of them going back four generations before Jesus. All of this intellectual enterprise was aimed at "assuring" his divinity, since they were convinced that the body and human sexuality could in no way be divine or sacred.

Ivone Gebara

Ivone Gebara is a religious sister and a well-known Brazilian theologian and philosopher. Since the 1970s she has been an outstanding intellectual, one very committed to the cause of the poor. Starting in the 1980s, however, she changed directions, after a conversation she had with a poor woman who made her see that "she was talking like a man". Since then she has been an active, brilliant feminist who speaks of human and divine reality from the perspective of women and condemns a great deal of typical Christian discourse for being "eminently anthropocentric, androcentric, white and western". She believes that there exists "a greater mystery, whether it be called God or not". She hold that all Christian beliefs need to be rethought and reformulated so that they say something to the men – and especially to the women – of today. In her own words: *I opt for the spirit of criticism. Our Church is often a slave to its dogmas, norms, laws and principles; it appears straitjacketed and incapable of responding to the new questions that people are asking.* For this reason Ivone takes part in our program, giving her views on what she, along with countless other biblical scholars and theologians, knows and believes about the meaning of Mary's virginity.

Interview 13
JOSEPH: MARY'S HUSBAND?

RACHEL The microphones of Emisoras Latinas are continuing their transmission from just outside the Basilica of the Annunciation in the city of Nazareth, where, it would seem, nothing really got announced. At least, that is what we have been told in our exclusive interview with Jesus Christ, the son of Mary.

JESUS And Joseph.

RACHEL Welcome once again, Jesus. Let's talk, then, about Joseph. It's been said that you came from a very poor family. But at least your father had a carpentry workshop.

JESUS A workshop? Around here nobody had anything.

RACHEL But wasn't Joseph a carpenter? Wouldn't he have belonged to the middle class and be what today we call a small businessman?

JESUS Middle class! Here the only class was the class of the unemployed.

RACHEL But in the gospel it says that you were the son of the carpenter.

JESUS They must have put it that way to give my father a little more status, but like everybody in Nazareth he was a Jack-of-all-trades.

RACHEL A Jack-of-all-trades?

JESUS Yes, somebody who could do almost anything. My dad worked on any job that offered itself. If the landlord came, he would hire him to harvest grapes. The next day he would build a wall. The following day he was harvesting wheat. And most days it was hand to mouth. Work was hard to find in Galilee.

RACHEL Well, then, let's get back to the matter which is of most interest to our audience. In the last interview you stated that Joseph was your father, your real father.

JESUS Yes, of course.

RACHEL That means that … that Mary and Joseph were wife and husband.

JESUS Naturally.

RACHEL And that they lived together as spouses.

JESUS Obviously – how else were they going to live?

RACHEL It's not so obvious, because they have always painted Joseph for us as an old man, with a white beard and a flowering staff.

JESUS The only staff that I remember in my father's hands is the one he had once when I was behaving badly.

RACHEL No, I was referring to his chastity. Because, if it's not indiscreet, I would like to ask about the human aspect of that couple. Were they in love, did they love each other? Or were they a holy family, a married couple, in appearance only?

JESUS What are you talking about, Rachel? They loved each other very much. My father always called my mother "My dusky darlingm" like the phrase in the Song of Songs. You know that love poem, don't you?

RACHEL Yes, I read it once.

JESUS I used to love it when I saw my mom and dad walking arm in arm in the evening. My brother James and I would climb up on the wall to spy on them. Sometimes we used to catch them kissing, and my mom would get embarrassed and blush.

RACHEL But in the gospel it says that while they were still engaged, Mary became pregnant, and Joseph had many doubts and even thought about leaving her. Did you know about this crisis that happened before they were married?

JESUS As you can well understand, Rachel, I never asked them about such things. Although once…

RACHEL Once what?

JESUS Once, here in Nazareth, the kids insulted me. They called me a bastard.

RACHEL But why would they have done that?

JESUS Well, in those days they sometimes took advantage of the young women, they forced them to…

RACHEL Just like now.

JESUS But as I say, I never asked them anything about that. And I wasn't worried about it either, because Joseph loved me very much. He made me into a man. He taught me to work, he taught me to be just. Some day I'll tell you about how he died.

RACHEL And so, the possibility that your father was not your father …

JESUS A father isn't just the one who begets. Any animal knows how to do that. A father is one who bring you up, who teaches you to live.

RACHEL To sum up for our listeners, then Jesus Christ has left us without angels making announcements to Mary, without dreams revealing things to Joseph, without virgins giving birth… What are we left with?

JESUS You're left with love. My mom and dad loved each other. That is the most important thing, the only important thing.

RACHEL So now, friends, we would like to hear from all of you. The telephones of Emisoras Latinas are ready to receive your calls. You can also contact us through our website, www.emisoraslatinas.net. This is Rachel Perez, reporting from Nazareth.

MUSIC.

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INTERVIEW 13: BACKGROUND MATERIAL

Joseph, the great unknown

While the gospels provide some important information that helps us sketch some traits of Mary's personality, they tell us practically nothing about Joseph. Mary speaks in the gospels, but Joseph doesn't say a single word. He appears several times, but just in two of the four gospels, and only in the stories of Jesus' infancy, which are not exactly historical or biographical, as we have seen. Rather, these infancy narratives serve to transmit important symbols of Hebrew culture, since they are constructed around references to persons and events from the Old Testament. For example, when Joseph learns in his dreams that Mary is pregnant with child, we are reminded of the famous Joseph of the book of Genesis, who dreamed about the future. Despite the little we know about Joseph of Nazareth, the Catholic Church has produced countless books about him, and a there is even a branch of theology called "Josephology". For years now the "Josephologists" have been holding international congresses in various countries to carry on their speculations about the meaning of this man's life.

A Jack-of-all-trades

The idea that Joseph was a carpenter is based on the verse in Matthew's gospel where Jesus is spoken of as "the carpenter's son" (Matthew 13,55). The Aramaic word that describes this trade is "nagar", which actually has the somewhat broader meaning of "artisan". The Greek word used by Matthew is "tekton", which is an even broader concept, designating a general worker, someone who does all kinds of work.

Child of a "single mother"?

In order to reinforce the idea of Mary's physical virginity, tradition has portrayed Joseph as an old man, as one incapable of sexual energy or activity. It's possible that Joseph was not the real father of Joseph, but the reason was not because Mary conceived Jesus virginally. Rather the reason could have been that Jesus was begotten as the result of rape.

This conjecture finds some grounds in John's gospel, where Jesus is called a "Samaritan", which was a harsh insult, equivalent to being called a "bastard" (John 8,48). It also finds grounds in the fact that in Mark's gospel Jesus is described simply as the "son of Mary" (Mark 6,3); identifying somebody this way was unusual at the time since people were usually identified in relation to their fathers. We can even find evidence for this view in the very word that Matthew uses to speak of Mary: "parthenos". This Greek word referred literally to physical virginity, but it was also a euphemism used to describe both unmarried women who were pregnant (our present-day "single mothers") and women who became pregnant as a result of rape. Thus, a child whose father was not known was called a "virgin's kid". This was because in ancient times virginity referred more to a social condition (a woman without a man) than to a physical state (a woman with her hymen intact).

The theory of Mary's rape

In the earliest polemics between paganism and Christianity, mention is made of the fact that Mary was raped. The pagan philosopher Celsus in his "True Doctrines", a work written in the year 178, even gives the name of the rapist: Panthera, a Roman soldier. This was a Greek name that was quite common at the time, and it was also the name of one of the Roman legions that was occupying Palestine around the years that Jesus was born.

The Roman troops committed sexual violations against Galilean women with great frequency. Such gross behavior was at that time – as it still is today, in many wars and military interventions – an expression not only of brute masculine desire, but also of the abusive power and physical aggression by which male warriors sought to establish their supremacy and dominion over the conquered territories and their inhabitants.

A just man

In Matthew's gospel Joseph is described with a single word: he was "just". Justice was a quality that the prophets attributed especially to God. In the Hebrew culture saying that God is just means that God is righteous, that God does justice, that God takes the side of those who are subjected and made powerless, that God has compassion on the poor and defends them, that God is fair and cannot be swayed by pretty words or sacred rites. Whether Joseph was Jesus' real father or simply his adoptive father, there is no doubt that he helped the lad develop his sense of justice.

Joseph in literature

Joseph of Nazareth has been much more present in painting that he has in literature. He often appears in films, but usually as an obscure, secondary character. The Portuguese author José Saramago, who won the Nobel prize for literature, made Joseph into an exceptional protagonist in the first part of his novel "The Gospel according to Jesus Christ". In the novel Joseph is crucified by error

in Sepphoris, the capital of Galilee, a tragedy that has a decisive influence on the life of the young Jesus.

Interview 14
THE SIGN OF THE COVENANT?

RACHEL Emisoras Latinas continues to provide you with complete coverage of the surprising and astonishing second coming of Jesus Christ to the world. Today we have installed our microphones in what was once the old synagogue of Nazareth.

JESUS Good morning, Rachel.

RACHEL As you all can hear, we are once again joined by Jesus Christ, who has not been recognized by the pilgrims visiting this place. Jesus, I understand you were baptized here as a child.

JESUS How do you mean baptized?

RACHEL Oh no, excuse my mistake, I'm just so full of emotion. It's just that I'm still not used to conversing with you.

JESUS I did get baptized, Rachel, but it was when I was older, in the Jordan River, when the prophet John began preaching about justice.

RACHEL I didn't mean baptism, I meant circum…, circum…

JESUS Circumcision.

RACHEL You did get circumcised, right?

JESUS Of course, because I'm a Jewish man. Among the Jews all the males are circumcised.

RACHEL For those in our audience who are not familiar with this ancient rite, could you explain to us what it consists in?

JESUS Perhaps this rabbi who's coming along could explain it better than I. Rachel, hide yourself behind me. Hey, master! Shalom!

RABBI Shalom, son. What can I do for you? Do I know you?

JESUS Maybe, rabbi. The thing is, this young woman is not from here and wants to know something about circumcision.

RABBI What young woman?

RACHEL Good day, rabbi, I…

RABBI What? A woman, a pagan, and with her legs bare? [Spits]

JESUS Do you see that, Rachel?

RACHEL But why did he rush away? Why did he turn his back on me? I don't understand at all.

JESUS Let him be. He is a blind guide, as were so many in my time. You wanted to know something about circumcision, right?

RACHEL Yes, so that our audience can be better informed.

JESUS Listen, when the time comes for circumcision, the parents bring their newborn boy to the synagogue. The rabbi takes a sharp knife and cuts away the little ring of skin that covers the male organ. It's called the foreskin.

RACHEL Excuse my ignorance, but what's the meaning behind such a strange rite as that?

JESUS Moses instituted it as a sign of the covenant between God and his people.

RACHEL I can imagine it's painful for the child.

JESUS They cry for a while, but they're soon over it. Now, at a older age, is when it hurts.

RACHEL At an older age? Could you please explain?

JESUS It hurts that my people are so,… so… how do you put it now? So mannish, so male, so…

RACHEL So male chauvinist?

JESUS That's it male chauvinist. See, Rachel, they claimed that God established his covenant only with us, the males. And what about you women?

RACHEL Well, sure, we women don't have…, we don't have …

JESUS You don't have a penis.

RACHEL But you never spoke about circumcision in your preaching?

JESUS No, I never did, because I never liked that law. The covenant is the wedding ring that joins together God and his people. How is it possible that it should be symbolized by the skin that covers the penis?

RACHEL Yes, you're right, that reflects a very masculine kind of religion.

JESUS In my day the men used to pray the following prayer every day "Thank you, Lord, that I was born a Jew and not born a woman." Certainly that rabbi who turned his back on you is still saying that prayer.

RACHEL What about you? Did you pray it sometimes?

JESUS Never. I felt that it was an insult to God.

RACHEL Why?

JESUS Because… You want me to give you a scoop on something, a piece of good news?

RACHEL Of course I do.

JESUS First, turn off that little gadget.

RACHEL Okay. Now, tell me. [Jesus whispers in her ear.] Do you really think so? Will you allow me to say it on the air?

JESUS No, not now. Later. Then you can shout from the rooftops what I just whispered in your ear.

RACHEL But for now, it's strictly confidential. Friends, in a future broadcast we'll tell you this incredible secret that Jesus just confided to me. This is Rachel Perez. Emisoras Latinas. Nazareth.

MUSIC

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INTERVIEW 14: BACKGROUND MATERIAL

Microsurgery

Circumcision consists in the amputation of the foreskin, the tissue that covers the tip of the penis. This microsurgery leaves the glans exposed in such a way that it can easily be seen who is circumcised and who is not. Circumcision is done for religious, cultural and medical reasons. In recent years circumcision of newborn boys has become common in some countries, for reasons of improved hygiene and prevention of infectious diseases. However, the preventive value of circumcision is being increasingly questioned; in fact, circumcision is associated with certain health risks since it involves such a delicate, sensitive part of the body. Some groups consider circumcision to be a form of mutilation; they view it as an expression of contempt for the body based on religious ideas.

An ancient custom

Circumcision was practiced in ancient Egypt, and it's possible that the people of Israel learned of the rite from the Egyptians. Among many peoples today circumcision is performed during adolescence, as a rite of initiation to an active sexual life. In Israel it was considered a sacred rite that embodied the covenant of God with his people; it was a sign that the male Israelite was incorporated into the people of Abraham. According to the book of Genesis, God ordered Abraham to be circumcised at the age of 99, and so the lineage of the people of Israel began with him (Genesis, 17,1-27).

In the time of Jesus, a baby boy was circumcised eight days after his birth, and at that time he was also given his name. This is still the custom with pious Jews today. The practice of circumcision was hotly debated in the first Christian communities. It was Paul who proposed that the rite should not be required of Gentiles, since he wanted to attract to Christianity all those Mediterranean peoples who were not familiar with the custom and would not accept it. In the churches of Egypt and Ethiopia circumcision continued to be practiced. In Islam, which was much influenced by Judaism and Christianity, the males are still circumcised, even thought the Koran does not prescribe it.

A super-masculine religion

The religious rite of circumcision, which is only practiced on males, is another expression of the patriarchal character of the Jewish religion. What can be more male chauvinist than having the people's covenant with God symbolized by an act performed on the penis?

Yahweh, the God of Judaism, is different from the other gods of ancient times: he is a super-masculine, solitary male, without a mother and without a spouse. He is an ancestral father god: tribal, warlike, and jealous. In that culture and in that religion men are considered superior to women, and they are brought up to believe this. Pious Jewish men recited then, and still recite today, a prayer in which they thank God for having been born Jews and not pagans, and for having been born men and not women. They feel themselves to be especially chosen as a people, and also as a gender!

A pious Jewish man will not speak with foreign women and will go out of his way just to avoid coming into contact with the shadow that a woman throws on the ground. In the Hebrew language the words "just", "pious" and "holy" have no feminine form because it is assumed that women cannot be just or pious or holy! "Unfortunate is the person whose children are girls" is a popular Jewish saying. In the Jewish synagogues the women stay in back, separated from the men. And at the Wall of Lamentations in Jerusalem the women pray in a place apart from where the men pray, and in a space that is smaller than men's.

Patriarchal, misogynous and male chauvinist

Such contempt, disrespect and rejection of women has not the least basis in the words and attitudes of Jesus of Nazareth, who contravened all the patriarchal principles of his religion and all the male chauvinist traditions of his culture. Nevertheless, this contempt for women passed over from Judaism to Christianity, championed first of all by Paul, who was trained as a Pharisee. Later on the same contempt was found in all the Church Fathers, with Augustine at the head of them: he went so far as to claim that women had no souls!

The literature of the first centuries of Christianity is saturated with so much misogyny that it provokes consternation and demands serious reflection and self-criticism, which are still nowhere in evidence. Protestantism has not changed this orientation in any substantive way. Today the Catholic Church is betraying Jesus of Nazareth; it is fighting against the advances in humanity's growing knowledge and sensibility around issues of gender, and it is presenting itself to the world as the West's most male chauvinist institution.

All based on a myth

In the course of the centuries, both Judaism and Christianity have argued in favor of the subjection of women and the superiority of men. They have created a rigid, seamless doctrine based on the myth of Adam and Eve, which they take to be a concrete event that actually occurred. They read the book of Genesis as if it were a historical, or even scientific, text, and they present it as revealed truth which completely explains the meaning of human existence, the role of women and men in history, and the relations of humankind with God.

Interview 15
SAVIOR OR SAVED?

RACHEL From the synagogue in Nazareth, this is Emisoras Latinas. According the latest audience surveys, our network is number one in the ratings, thanks to the remarkable revelations that we have been hearing each day from our special guest, Jesus Christ. And the number of people viewing our web page is breaking all records. Even so, the vast majority of the news media continue to have doubts about your identity, Jesus.

JESUS And do you also, Rachel?

RACHEL No, not me. I believe that… you are you. Although I don't deny that at times… But let's go on to other matters. You already explained to us that you were circumcised when you were eight days old.

JESUS That day they also gave me my name.

RACHEL Jesus.

JESUS Yes, Jesus, but in my language it's pronounced differently *Yehoshuah* – that's the way it sounds.

RACHEL I understand that Jesus, or Yehoshuah, means Savior, and that your parents gave you that name because they knew about your saving mission.

JESUS Well, I'm not so sure of that, because in my time it was a very common name. Several of my friends were called Jesus. You see, it's the same name as Joshua, the great Israelite leader who first led our people to these lands.

RACHEL [cell phone rings] We have a call… Yes? Hello? Where are you calling from?

GUTIERRE Yes, I'm Gutierre Tibon, and I'm calling from Mexico. But I'm sorry I have to disappoint you, Miss Perez.

RACHEL Why disappoint me?

GUTIERRE Because any scholar who has studied Hebrew etymology knows that "Jesus" does not mean "Savior" – it means "Saved".

RACHEL Saved? Saved by whom?

GUTIERRE Saved by God. That's the way the name Jesus should be translated. Let me take advantage of this call to ask you to give Jesus my greetings.

RACHEL Happy to do so. We thank our Mexican friend, Gutierre. How about you, Jesus? Did you know that your name means "Saved by God"?

JESUS Of course. Among my people we all know the meaning of our names. We place much importance on each person's name.

RACHEL But you are not saved, you are the savior. The Savior of the World. Or am I wrong?

JESUS I was saved by God just like you and everybody else. God is the only one who saves.

RACHEL But…

JESUS Let's forget about that for now and continue to talk about names. Do you know what your name means, Rachel?

RACHEL No, I don't.

JESUS Sheep.

RACHEL Sheep?

JESUS Yes, sheep of God

RACHEL That's nice. I like it.

JESUS And my mother Mary's name? It's very pretty also. Once somebody told me that it meant bitterness. But then I thought they must be wrong, because all the Marys I know are joyful women. Afterwards, a rabbi explained to me that Mary actually means "rebel woman". I liked that more. And it fit my mother to a T.

RACHEL In your time people used to remember the names of their ancestors, they used to know their genealogies.

JESUS Yes, we remembered our grandparents, our great-grandparents…

RACHEL And with all the more reason in your case, since your family line descended from great royalty.

JESUS What royalty do you mean?

RACHEL I've read that your father Joseph was descended from none less that King David himself. You have royal blood.

JESUS Hah! Sounds like the same kind of trick they used to have me born in Bethlehem, in order to make me look like an heir to King David! But I'm just a Galilean peasant…

RACHEL All the same, there are a lot of books that have been written about the Holy Grail.

JESUS What's that, the Holy Grail?

RACHEL Holy Grail, Holy Blood. Through your veins, Jesus Christ, royal blood is running. You are the son of kings.

JESUS I am a son of man. That's what I always called myself. One of many, just like everybody else…

RACHEL A certain Jesus?

JESUS Yes, just so. Because in this world nobody has royal blood, nobody is a blueblood. All the bloods are alike, red. And we are all brothers and sisters, we have all been saved by God, the only King, the only Savior.

RACHEL Well, there you have it, folks, another exclusive interview with Jesus the Savior – I mean, Jesus the Saved. Reporting for you from Nazareth, this has been Sheep Perez, I mean Rachel Perez, for Emisoras Latinas. Wow, what confusion…

MUSIC.

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INTERVIEW 15: BACKGROUND MATERIAL

Yehoshua

"Jesus" is the Greek form of the Hebrew name pronounced "Yeshua", which in ancient times had the form "Yehoshua". It means "God saves" and also "God liberates". For centuries it was one of the most popular names for men among the Israelites. The first famous person to bear it was Joshua, the leader who took over from Moses in the great saga that tells of Israel's traveling through the desert to reach the "promised land".

Gutierre Tibon

Gutierre Tibon was a professor at the National University of Mexico and the author of the Comparative Etymological Dictionary of Proper Names of Persons, an excellent sourcebook on the original meanings of personal names. Gutierre takes part in our program on the basis of this work of his, which is as thorough as it is interesting.

An etymological change

The best explanation for the name Jesus is found in the Bible itself, in the book of the prophet Isaiah (12,2): *God is my salvation, Yahweh has saved me*. The evangelists, however, who were

announcing Jesus as the Messiah, changed the etymology around and interpreted “Jesus” as “savior” instead of “saved”. As a result we read in Matthew 1,21 the following: *He will be called Jesus because he will save his people from their sins.*

The importance of names

For Israel, as for all Middle Eastern peoples and most ancient cultures, names were used not just to distinguish one person from another, but to indicate each person’s deeper identity. The name “made” the person: it indicated who she or he was in the world. Giving a child a name had great meaning. It was not a formality or a simple social gesture. Understanding the great importance of names helps explain the extraordinary reverence that Israelites felt toward the name of their God: Yahweh. They believed that somehow just speaking a name made present the person who bore it. They also considered telling another person one’s name to be a sign of great confidence. For that reason they did not give their names when starting a conversation, but only at the end, after a certain mutual knowledge had been established. They also thought that someone who knew another person’s name had power over that person.

No genealogy without theology

Every Israelite family traced its genealogy to indicate where it came from and from which of the twelve tribes it was descended. In this way each family knew which branch of God’s people it was located on. The relation to the tribe of Judah was the one that produced the greatest number of genealogical trees. And the most prominent genealogy within the tribe of Judah with that of the family of David, since that king had left such a strong mark on Israel’s history. In general, the Israelites were familiar with the names of their ancestors for several generations back.

In writing their gospels, both Matthew and Luke drew up genealogies to show that Jesus belonged to the family of King David. In this way they also “proved” that he was the Messiah. A person’s genealogy was always traced through the ancestors of the father, not those of the mother. Therefore the evangelists had Joseph, not Mary, belong to the line of David. Thus they were not trying to formulate an accurate, biographical genealogy, but were rather elaborating a theology and a catechesis for the communities for which they were writing.

The legend of the Holy Grail

Traditionally the Holy Grail refers to the goblet that Jesus used at his last supper, before he was killed, and it is said that Joseph of Arimathea used the same cup to catch Jesus’ blood when he was nailed to the cross. It seems rather unlikely that anyone would have preserved that goblet over many centuries, but there are many medieval legends about the search for this “sacred object”.

The religiosity of those times had an obsession with the finding and reverencing of relics. One of the most famous legends, transmitted orally at first and later written down, told of King Arthur’s Knights of the Round Table, who went in search of the Holy Grail in Albion, a mythical island identified with Great Britain. Supposedly it had been taken there by Joseph of Arimathea, who as a wealthy merchant traveled far and wide.

More legends, more symbols

Other legends about the Holy Grail existed throughout Europe. In the course of time the Grail ceased to be thought of as a concrete goblet and became instead a spiritual object that guaranteed good health. More recently, to reinforce the idea of Jesus' royal lineage, the Holy Grail was identified with Royal Blood or "Sangreal" [compare "Santo Grial" in Spanish]. In an even broader symbolic interpretation, the grail or cup is proposed as an allegory of the female womb, such as we find it in Dan Brown's novel *The Da Vinci Code.*

The legend of the Holy Grail has been the source of inspiration for many works of art and literature, such as Richard Wagner's opera "Parsifal", John Boorman's film "Excalibur", and Umberto Eco's novel "Foucault's Pendulum".

Interview 16
JESUS ILLITERATE?

RACHEL We now continue our interviews with Jesus Christ during his second coming to our world. We find ourselves in Nazareth, his birthplace, next to the town's old synagogue, where he studied – because I imagine you did study here, Jesus,…

JESUS Study,… well, you might call it study. The rabbi taught us a few things from the Law. But since we were rascals …

RACHEL And where did you do your university studies?

JESUS University studies?

RACHEL I mean philosophy, theology… Perhaps you got a scholarship to study in Qumran, that monastery on the shores of the Dead Sea that was so famous in your time?

JESUS Qumran? That's far away from here. Besides, as far as I know, only the sons of Jerusalem families went there to study. I know John the Baptist went there, but I never got to know that part of the desert.

RACHEL And so where did you study, Jesus?

JESUS Nowhere really. I was never able to study. My parents were very poor.

RACHEL Well, at least they taught you the basics in the synagogue, right?

JESUS In the synagogue they taught us the Law, but the Law was written in Hebrew, and we spoke Aramaic. So the rabbi used to translate it for us, and he made us repeat it.

RACHEL But did you know how to read?

JESUS As you said the basics.

RACHEL But wasn't it here in this same synagogue of Nazareth where you stood up to read a text of a prophet, I think it was Isaiah?

JESUS Want me to tell you a secret? That text was one I knew by heart. It's my favorite prophecy. And so I stepped forward, unrolled the scroll and began "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me. He sends me to the poor to announce to them Good News."

RACHEL Let me tell you something, Jesus our audience must really be confused – because if you didn't know how to read, then how could you write?

JESUS I didn't know how to write. The priests and the scribes were the ones who controlled all the books.

RACHEL But don't you remember the case of the woman caught in adultery, when you stooped down to write on the ground and …

JESUS I was just drawing figures, the way prisoners do. I was whiling away my time until those old hypocrites left the scene.

RACHEL Then, Mr. Christ, and pardon me if what I say is offensive, but are you for all practical purposes illiterate?

JESUS I'm not offended at all, Rachel, because none of the peasants in my time were ever able to read or write, especially not the women. My mother wouldn't recognize a curl on the letter Aleph.

RACHEL The Virgin Mary, I mean, Mary not so virgin, was illiterate also?

JESUS Yes she was, Rachel. I am really amazed myself these days when I see all these very small children, even girls, reading and writing. So much has changed in the world in these years, really!

YOUTH Wait, hold on! … Are you Rachel Perez of Emisoras Latinas?

RACHEL Are you a reporter from the other media?

YOUTH No, I'm a fan of these programs of yours. I love the way Jesus Christ talks. Tough! Keep telling it like it is, don't let up, Jesus! Would you please give me your autograph?

JESUS What's this young fellow asking me for, Rachel?

RACHEL He wants you to sign his notebook.

JESUS Sign it?

RACHEL Yes, he wants you to write your name there.

JESUS Ah, well, that's something I know how to write.

RACHEL Here, take this pen.

JESUS My father Joseph taught me those four letters. Let me see now, wait…

YOUTH Thank a lot, Jesus Christ, my pal! I'll keep this as a treasure!

RACHEL How about you, friends in our listening audience? Do you also want Jesus' autograph? All you have to do is call us at 714-4000, seven-one-four four thousand. We'll continue after a short break. This is Emisoras Latinas, Rachel Perez reporting from Nazareth.

MUSIC.

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INTERVIEW 16: BACKGROUND MATERIAL

Literacy: a recently recognized right

The art of writing was born in Mesopotamia about four thousand years ago. During most of human history the privilege of learning how to read and write was reserved for minorities such as the priestly caste and certain merchants. While there were always more readers than writers, even reading was not a skill taught to most people until relatively recently in most of the world. Until the invention of the printing press, books were expensive and rare. Starting from the 15th century, the publication of printed books in Europe made reading more widespread, but it is only since the 18th century that books were sought out and appreciated by the educated minorities in society.

As with so many other advances in human culture, the hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church went on the defensive in the face of the great increase in the reading public that resulted from the invention of the press. In 1559 the Inquisition created the Index of Prohibited Books, a list of authors and works which people were forbidden to read under pain of excommunication; in the case of books that were only partially censured, a list of the permissible chapters was given. The last Index was published in 1790 and included a large number of scientific works that were not recommended for good Catholics. Incredible as it may seem, the Index was not finally abolished until 1966. If these interviews with Jesus Christ had been published a few decades ago, they certainly would have been listed on the Index of Prohibited Books!

The rise of the nation-states starting in the 16th century brought about the need to unify the populations living in a given territory, and the process of mass education was begun to help bring that about, although even today in many places the education of the masses is severely deficient. UNESCO, the U.N. organization for education, science and culture, calculates that if present tendencies continue – impoverishment of the majority of people and concentration of wealth and knowledge in a minority – then in the year 2010 there will still be 830 million adults in the world who are illiterate. A much larger number of persons will be functional illiterates, that is, they will know elementary reading and writing, but they will not have the basic skills needed for productive employment.

To be a Jew is to be a reader

Jesus certainly received some literacy instruction, though it was probably very basic, given the time in which he lived and especially his situation of living in a rural part of Galilee. We should keep in mind that by the time of Jesus the people of Israel formed a nation that was highly organized around a book, called the Torah. To cite rabbi and philosopher Marc-Alain Ouaknin: *Reading is the essential*

activity of Jews; being a reader, from childhood on, is a way of being Jewish; that explains why there are no illiterate Jews.

Only male children

Even in the time of Jesus, all the boys had to attend school from the age of five. The classes were conducted in the synagogue, the place where community came together every Saturday to pray and hear the Scriptures read, and where during the week the rabbis taught the boys to read, but not to write. Writing was controlled by the scribes.

The girls did not go to school, since it was thought they did not need any education for their one and only occupation as adults: taking care of the house and the children. Only the girls from better-off families in the capital received some instruction. For that reason, those images we see of Mary in paintings, where she is pictured as reading a book, are quite a stretch of the imagination. It could be that Jesus knew something about letters, but Mary would have been completely illiterate.

To read the scriptures

The boys used to learn to read passages from the scriptures, especially from the Torah, the first five books of the Hebrew Bible, which Moses was thought to have written. General education usually ended at twelve years of age, when the boy reached puberty and legally became an adult. Such an education was not considered to be primarily a training in letters and words, which would later allow the student to read other things and increase his knowledge; rather, it was aimed at familiarizing the student with the sacred scriptures, which contained the history, the traditions and the laws of the people – and which, besides, were practically the only written texts available. The hope was that the young man, when he finished his basic schooling, would know by heart a good portion of the scriptures.

The scribes

The sacred scriptures were controlled by the scribes. The figure of the scribe was a common one in many ancient cultures. They were educated men who knew how to read and write, and their main work consisted in writing texts dictated to them, putting commercial transactions into writing, and recording historical documents. In Israel they copied the scriptures, interpreted the Law and even made sure that people complied with the Law's many stipulations. As a result they possessed great authority as teachers and theologians. In the time of Jesus there were closely identified with the Pharisees, and for that reason they appear often in the gospel narratives.

Written in Hebrew

Jesus spoke the Aramaic language, but the Torah and the other scriptures were written in Hebrew. Hebrew has an alphabet of 22 letters, and it a language that is written and read from right to left, which is the opposite direction from what we use in European languages. In Hebrew the only letters written are the consonants, not the vowels. In this interview, Jesus refers to the day when he read in the synagogue of Nazareth a passage from the prophet Isaiah (Matthew 13,53-58; Mark 6,1-6; Luke 4,16-28), which naturally was written in Hebrew.

The Essenes and the Dead Sea Scrolls

The Essenes were a religious group that began to form in Judea about 200 years before the birth of Jesus. They were highly critical of the religious practices of the Jerusalem Temple, and to express their repudiation they went out into the desert to live a sort of monastic existence in the Qumran community, on the shores of the Dead Sea. There they used to receive young men to be their disciples. One of their jobs was making copies of the sacred scriptures.

When in 70 A.D. the Romans destroyed Jerusalem, the Essenes fled from the monastery, but before fleeing they left buried in nearby caves some clay urns filled with their manuscripts. These so-called "Dead Sea Scrolls", mostly written on animal hides and one on a copper sheet, were finally discovered between 1947 and 1956. They are the most ancient manuscripts known of some of the Old Testament books. The manuscripts are written mostly in Hebrew, but many are in Aramaic and a few in Greek.

Interview 17
LOST IN THE TEMPLE?

RACHEL We are passing through the streets of Nazareth in the company of Jesus Christ, covering his second coming to earth. For today's interview our audience has asked us to look into those long years when Jesus led a hidden life.

JESUS But I never hid myself, Rachel! Galilee was a remote area, sure, but everybody there knew me.

RACHEL I believe our audience is referring to the years when you were hidden away in India.

JESUS In India?

RACHEL Yes, there are some people who claim that, when you were young, you lived in Kashmir and that there you became a master of Eastern wisdom.

JESUS Now that's a good one! Look, Rachel, only once did I ever reach the northern border, up there by Tyre and Sidon. As a kid, the furthest I ever went was to Jerusalem, three days south of here, to celebrate Passover there.

RACHEL You're no doubt referring to your first trip, when you were twelve years old and got lost in the Temple

JESUS Yes, that time I got lost because of my curiosity. The thing is, for a Galilean boy like me, seeing Jerusalem for the first time was … how to explain it? It was such a big city, with so many people, so many buildings, and the Temple!

RACHEL The Temple of Jerusalem one of the marvels of the ancient world.

JESUS When I beheld that marvel, I escaped from my parents, and I went running down the esplanade and got lost among the crowds of people. I found some groups of young guys listening to some old men who were telling stories. I joined one of the groups to see what I might learn. I can still remember that.

RACHEL I remember that also.

JESUS But how can you remember that, Rachel?

RACHEL You're telling us a story we know well, the one where you as a child were arguing on a par with the doctors of the law.

JESUS On a par, no. I was there listening to them. I asked a few questions.

RACHEL Because of that famous account, many people considered you a child prodigy, a brilliant lad, a genius.

JESUS I was no prodigy, Rachel. What I had was curiosity. At that age, twelve years old, a child wants to know everything.

RACHEL And at that age you already knew what your mission would be. You were already aware of what was awaiting you.

JESUS That day what was awaiting me was a tremendous scolding! It took my parents a long time to find me in the crowds of people. And then I was being scolded all the way to Nazareth!

RACHEL Please let me insist on this question, Jesus Christ, and I would ask you not to dodge it. At that age you already knew, right?

JESUS Knew what?

RACHEL You knew the divine mission for which you had come into the world. You were human, but you also had a divine consciousness. You knew.

JESUS I knew what all kids at that age know.

RACHEL But everything that you were going to do was already written down in the sacred books. You already knew.

JESUS Everything that I was going to do? I didn't know anything, Rachel. What was I to know?

RACHEL But in your consciousness…

JESUS Listen, Rachel. God gives each one of us a book full of blank pages, and we keep writing in it, some with better script, others with crooked lines. In that first journey to Jerusalem, I had filled up only twelve pages, the first ones of the story of my life. The others were still blank.

RACHEL Friends in our radio audience, are you satisfied with what Jesus is saying? It seems to me you're not. I suspect that at this stage in our interviews we all have more questions than answers. And so we promise you that we'll be back with more interviews with Jesus Christ. Emisoras Latinas. Rachel Perez. Nazareth.

MUSIC

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INTERVIEW 17: BACKGROUND MATERIAL

The legendary “hidden life”

Since very little is known about Jesus’ early years, that period is spoken of as his “hidden life”. During that time he was supposedly preparing himself and training for the great mission that he would have later on.

Many fanciful speculations have arisen from people’s attempts to characterize as “mysterious” what must have been an absolutely normal rural life, with nothing marvelous or special about it. In 1976 a book called *Jesus Lived and Died in Kashmir* was published, and it was soon translated into several European languages. Its author, Andreas Faber-Kaiser, claims to present historical data to the effect that Jesus did not die on the cross, but rather was cured of his wounds and fled with his mother Mary all the way to Kashmir, to the north of India. He chose that spot far removed from his homeland because he supposedly had spent his youthful “hidden” years there. According to the book he died in Kashmir at an advanced age.

Fantasizing about the hidden life of Jesus, as well as about the public years of his life, reaches its climax with the saga *The Trojan Horse*, a series of nine books written by the Spaniard Juan José Benítez; they are purely fictional stories that are often taken as history by unsuspecting readers.

Coming of age

In Jesus’ time boys began to fulfill the obligation of journeying to Jerusalem for the Passover feast at the age of thirteen, but it was the custom of the Israelites from the provinces to take them there at age twelve, so that they would become accustomed to fulfilling the precept a year before they were obliged to do so. Participation in the feast of Passover with all the people was a way of celebrating the lad’s coming of age. From that point on he became a genuine Israelite, for an Israelite was considered to be first and foremost “one who goes up to Jerusalem”.

The Jerusalem Temple

When Jesus went to Jerusalem for the first time, they were just finishing the reconstruction of the Temple, a work that had been begun by King Herod the Great some twenty years before. For the reconstruction many precious materials were used: yellow, black and white marbles; stones worked artistically by great sculptors; cedar panels brought from Lebanon to make coffered ceilings; and precious metals such as gold, silver and bronze.

All the entrances to the Temple had gates that were plated in gold and silver. In the atriums or patios that surrounded the main building there were great golden candelabras. The most splendid place of all was the sanctuary, the central part of the Temple. The white marble façade was covered with sheets of gold that were as thick as a denarius coin. A young country boy would have been totally dazzled and confused before such a display of wealth and luxury; he could never have imagined anything of the sort in his home village.

A schizophrenic personality

The traditional theology presents Jesus as one person possessing a divine nature and a human nature. These two natures would have made it possible for Jesus to possess a double consciousness. As God he would know everything; even as a child would have detailed knowledge of what was going to happen to him during his whole life. But as a man he would be obliged, like every human being, to discover things slowly and to discern his mission little by little.

Dogma proposes a man with two kinds of consciousness, one omniscient and the other limited – a sort of God disguised as a human. Or maybe a human who conceals a god within. Such ideas are rooted in Aristotelian philosophy and were made dogma centuries ago, but they end up making Jesus into a kind of schizophrenic, or perhaps a candidate for bipolar syndrome.

Interview 18
PRAYING THE ROSARY?

RECITER: *Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you…*

FAITHFUL: *Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners…*

RACHEL: We continue our reports from Nazareth, where we are now in the Orthodox Christian Church of the Annunciation. A group of Catholic pilgrims is praying the rosary in honor of the mother of Jesus. And we have with us once again Jesus Christ, as we cover his second coming to earth. This is a lovely devotion, praying the rosary, don't you think, Jesus?

JESUS: Explain something to me, Rachel. Why do they keep repeating the same thing over and over?

RACHEL: Because that's the way the rosary is. My granny taught me that you have to pray ten Hail Marys for each mystery. And since there are five mysteries, that means fifty Hail Marys. And since there are three sets of mysteries, altogether it would be one hundred fifty Hail Marys repeated.

JESUS: And who came up with that string of prayers?

RACHEL: As I understand it, it was your mother Mary who gave the rosary to… I don't remember what saint. You didn't know about that?

JESUS: My mother? How strange. Why don't you consult one of those friends of yours who know so much?

RACHEL: Hold on a minute. I'm going to contact someone who is sure to know the history of this…. Hello, Eduardo del Río? Rius? This is Rachel Perez of Emisoras Latinas. I am here in Nazareth with none less than Jesus Christ. … We would like to ask you about the rosary and its origin.

RIUS: Well, for that you have to go back eight hundred years, to the 12th century, when a Spanish friar, Domingo de Guzmán, was on his campaign to convert the Albigensians.

RACHEL: And who were the Albigensians?

RIUS: They were peaceful Christians, some of them even mystics, who questioned the Pope's authority. So this friar claimed that the mother of Jesus had appeared to him and had given him a rosary to convert the Albigensians.

JESUS: Ask him if they were converted…

RACHEL: Jesus is asking whether they were converted…

RIUS: Well, they weren't given much choice, because the ones that weren't converted were burned alive at the stake.

JESUS: What's that you said?

RIUS: Later on, in the 16th century, Pope Pius V ordered the Christian soldiers to pray the rosary before going into battle against the Muslim Turks, who were enemies of Rome. The two armies clashed in Lepanto, and it was truly a slaughter. The Pope declared that the Christians had crushed the Muslims thanks to the power of the Virgin Mary!

JESUS: What an abominable business!

RACHEL: But Jesus, isn't it quite understandable that your mother would take the side of the Christian armies?

JESUS: How can you say that, Rachel? There are no Christian armies. All armies are made for killing people, and my mother never killed anybody or helped to kill anybody.

RACHEL: Many thanks for that information, friend Rius. At any moment we may contact you again. … I suspect, Jesus, that our audience may be somewhat upset, because in many of her appearances your mother Mary has asked people to pray the rosary. Or isn't that the case?

JESUS: My mother was a very simple person. Do you really think she would be asking people to greet her by repeating the same prayer fifty times?

RACHEL: But there are many simple people, such as my granny, who pray the rosary. It's a way for them to find peace in their hearts and draw closer to God.

JESUS: Well, that's like when someone sits down by a river and the rippling of the water soothes their spirit. But neither your granny nor anybody else should think that by repeating and repeating a prayer they're going to be heard more by God. Because God knows what we need even before we tell him.

RACHEL: So then, what prayers should we say? We might even ask: do prayers serve any purpose at all? Be sure not to miss our next broadcast. Meanwhile check our website www.emisoraslatinas.net. This is Rachel Perez, reporting to you from Nazareth.

MUSIC

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INTERVIEW 18: BACKGROUND MATERIAL

How the Hail Mary originated

The first part of the prayer known as the Hail Mary (*Hail Mary, full of grace, …*) appeared in the Roman Missal starting in the 7th century. Three centuries later it was quite common in European countries for people to pray by repeating these phrases dozens of times over. In the monasteries of those days it was traditional for the monks to recite every day the 150 psalms of the Bible. Since the common people had no access to books and did not even know how to read, they began to imitate the monastic custom of reciting the psalms by repeating the first part of the Hail Mary 150 times. This devotion was known as "Mary's Psalter".

In the year 1208, the Roman Church was engaged in a war against the Cathari or Albigensians, who were considered heretics, in what is today southern France. A Spanish friar named Domingo de Guzmán claimed that Mary had "appeared" to him in a vision, in which she asked him to spread the devotion of praying the rosary since it was a "powerful arm" against the heretics. Thus Mary's Psalter came to be the Rosary. Almost three centuries later it became customary in many countries to add on the second part of the prayer: *Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners…*

The rosary: a political weapon

Until the present day Catholic devotion to the rosary has been associated both with the more traditional popular piety, which finds calm and consolation in such repetition of familiar words, and with political and military projects, like the religious wars, which are far removed from the teachings of Jesus.

In 1571 soldiers from the Papal States, Venice, Genoa and Spain fought against the Muslim armies at Lepanto, and after the slaughter of that naval battle they attributed the victory of Christianity over Islam to the praying of the rosary. In 1716 Prince Eugene of Savoy defeated a Turkish army at Temesvar in modern Romania, and that military victory was also attributed to the Christian troops' praying of the rosary. In 1917, in one of the many "apparitions" of Mary in Fatima, the praying of the rosary was recommended for "the conversion of Russia", that is, for the failure of the political project that was just getting underway in that country.

Nowadays the praying of the rosary is associated with the Vatican crusade against the sexual and reproductive rights of women. In Cleveland, United States, Jesus Christ supposedly spoke to a clairvoyant woman, asking that a special rosary be recited, in which the beads are seen as tears with a fetus inserted in each of them. According to the woman, such prayer has as its goal the halting of all abortions and the elimination of birth control and day-after pills, practices which, according to this unusual "revelation", are the cause of the wars and the natural disasters that are devastating our world.

The rosary: a mantra

In its more benevolent forms, the praying of the rosary – that rhythmic repetition of words – can be considered a Catholic version of the "mantras" of Hinduism and Buddhism. A "mantra" is a short

prayer that is repeated as a refrain many times over. In the Sanskrit language “man” means “mind”, and “tra” means “liberate”. The mantra is a word or phrase that has no specific meaning, but it is recited a certain number of times to achieve liberation of the mind by elevating the consciousness to a higher plane, but it can be recited also to attain material gains or spiritual goals. According to Hinduism, the mantra “Om” is the primordial sound of the universe, the origin and principle of all mantras. The Hinduism practiced in the West, such as the Hare Krishna movement, promotes the chanting of mantras for the spiritual benefit of people’s minds.

Eduardo del Río, Rius

Eduardo del Río, better known as Rius, is a Mexican writer, humorist and cartoonist. He specializes in preparing graphic didactic materials on a wide range of topics (history, nutrition, ecology, philosophy, biography, politics, economy). He has written several books which seek to expose the incoherencies of the Catholic religion and papal history. He also treats other religious topics, but in all his work he seeks to defend the profound humanism of Jesus of Nazareth. There is no one better than Rius to take part in our program and describe the historical relation between the pious devotion of the rosary and certain military campaigns.

The prayer of Jesus

Jesus criticized the Pharisees for the way they prayed, for they did so in public and by constant repetition of formulas (Matthew 6,5-8). Several times the gospels take note of Jesus’ custom of praying in silence at night (Luke 5,16). Probably Jesus also practiced the traditional prayers of his people: at dawn, in the evening, before meals, and on Saturdays in the synagogue. However, what especially impressed his contemporaries was his personal form of prayer, simply speaking with God, without the formalities and routines of traditional piety.

Interview 19
MOTHER OF GOD?

RACHEL Listeners of Emisoras Latinas, we continue our conversation with Jesus Christ about the rosary, a devotion that is very widespread in the Catholic world. You were telling us, Jesus, that your mother never asked anybody to pray the rosary. Who did, then? Perhaps you yourself, when you were walking through these lands?

JESUS No, that kind of prayer has something about it I don't like.

RACHEL Such as?

JESUS One phrase, something like "Holy Mary"...?

RACHEL Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us…

JESUS That part about "holy" is okay, because my mother and all mothers are saints. They are blessed. They create the miracle of life, the greatest of all miracles. But that part about "Mother of God"…

RACHEL Well, it's Mother of God because…

JESUS God doesn't have any mother or father. If he did, he wouldn't be God.

RACHEL But since you are the Son, consubstantial with God the Father, and Mary is your mother, then Mary is also the Mother of your Father, who is God… That is a dogma.

JESUS No, that's a mix-up. God has no beginning and no end. If God had a mother, he would be mortal like any mother's child. Who thought up such a thing?

RACHEL I don't know, but I can consult… let me see … maybe the British sociologist Anne Baring. She knows a lot about your mother… Hello, Anne Baring? This is Rachel Perez. I'd like to bother you to help resolve a doubt. Where did that idea come from, that Mary is the mother of God?

ANNE From the Council of Ephesus, in the fifth century. It was a maneuver of the bishop Cyril. This bishop, an arrogant character whose fanatical zeal made him order the burning down of the library of Alexandria, was in a dispute with another bishop called Nestorius.

JESUS And what does this dispute between bishops have to do with my mother?

RACHEL Jesus Christ asks what that has to do with his mother.

ANNE In the Council, Cyril wanted to crush the ideas of Nestorius concerning Mary. And for that reason he proposed the idea of "Theotokos".

RACHEL Theoto-what?

ANNE "Theotokos", a Greek word meaning that Mary is the mother of God. Since the rest of the bishops thought it was a heresy to state that God had a mother, Cyril bribed them with large sums of money. And he won the vote. Let's just say that this dogma about the Mother of God was well paid for!

RACHEL Thank you, Anne. Frankly, … our audience must be totally bewildered. What about you, Jesus? What do you think of what you just heard?

JESUS I think that in order to speak highly of my mother, there's no need to belittle God.

RACHEL If your mother were with us now…

JESUS She would be laughing, just like me. Not even Paul, who got so wound up speaking about me and about God, went so far as to say such a thing.

RACHEL But then, who is Mary?

JESUS Mary is my mother.

RACHEL And God?

JESUS God is God, Rachel. God doesn't have a mother. And you know why? Because God is a mother.

RACHEL One minute, Jesus, a call is coming in… Yes, hello? … How can that be? … Where are they? … Thanks for telling us. … Jesus, we have to leave.

JESUS What's happening?

RACHEL It seems that a group of Christians is incensed at the things you're saying, and they're coming this way. They want to stone you. They are fundamentalists from the Vatican, fanatics.

JESUS Like Cyril's people! History repeats itself. When I spoke here in Nazareth two thousand years ago, the same thing happened. No prophet is well received in his own land … or in his own church. Let's get out of here!

RACHEL Where to?

JESUS To Capernaum . I want to see the Sea of Galilee again! Let's go now.

RACHEL Let's go then. For Emisoras Latinas, this is Rachel Perez reporting from Galilee.

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INTERVIEW 19: BACKGROUND MATERIAL

Mary: encircled by four dogmas

The Catholic Church proclaims four "dogmas of faith" concerning Mary. The central dogma is that Mary is the Mother of God, and the others are: Mary is a Virgin, Mary had no original sin (Immaculate Conception), and Mary ascended bodily to heaven (Assumption). The Church also holds four other "fundamental truths" about Mary: she is the co-redemptrix, she is queen, she is the spiritual mother of all believers, and she is the mediatrix of all graces.

Devotion to Mary has increased irrepressibly in the course of the centuries. The first church dedicated to Mary did not appear until the fourth century, in Rome, and it was not until the eighth century that Mary was accorded the cult of "hyperdulia" (extreme reverence), which is below the "latria" (worship) that is due only to God and to Jesus, but way above the "dulia" (reverence) that is due the saints.

Starting in the 16th century, the Protestant Reformation called into question the cult of Mary, and as a result the historical Protestant churches do not profess the Marian dogmas. Unfortunately, however, the Protestant critique of Catholic Mariology did not reduce the patriarchal character of the Christianity that arose from the Reformation. Rather, it accentuated the masculine features of the religion and ended up rendering its spirituality emotionally impoverished.

Mother of God: a dogma

"Mary Mother of God" was a dogma defined by the Council of Ephesus (in 431) and later proclaimed by the Council of Chalcedon (in 451) and the Second Council of Constantinople (in 553). The formulation of the dogma was based on concepts of nature and person that were found in the Hellenist philosophy that then prevailed in Christendom. The definition of the dogma was preceded by a violent dispute between Cyril, the patriarch of Alexandria, and Nestorius, the patriarch of Constantinople. Cyril was proposing the formula of "Theotokos" (Mother of God), while Nestorius was proposing that of "Christotokos" (Mother of Christ, that is, of the human, mortal Jesus). In the end the doctrine proposed by Cyril was adopted as dogma, and Mary was given the title of Mother of God. The Nestorians were condemned as heretics.

The Alexandrians won the battle in Ephesus and Chalcedon. The Council of Ephesus formulated the dogma in this way: *From the start the Church teaches that in Christ there is only one person, the second person of the Blessed Trinity. Mary is not only the mother of the nature, the body, but also the mother of the person, who is God from all eternity. When Mary gave birth to Jesus, she gave birth in time to one who from all eternity was God. Just as every human mother is the mother not*

only of the human body but of the person, so Mary gave birth to a person, Jesus Christ, who is both God and man. Therefore, She is the Mother of God.

Anne Baring

Anne Baring is a British psychoanalyst who searches into people's unconscious and also into our collective unconscious. She and Jules Cashford, a British philosopher, have investigated the ways in which "the feminine" is present throughout the history of western religions and in the psyche of all humankind. The result of their study is the extraordinary book, *The Myth of the Goddess* (Penguin, 1993).

In this book Baring and Cashford present, among other things, the thesis that the "divinization" of Mary in the dogmas and in the cult of the Catholic religion expresses the need felt by all human spirituality for the feminine, that desire to recover the ancestral goddess, lost more than four thousand years ago. At the same time the authors state that in making Mary a "virgin" and robbing her of her sexuality, the Catholic ecclesiastical institution has set Mary apart from that Great Primordial Mother; it has made her rather into the "Queen of Heaven" and so denied her a reign "on earth". This cultural and religious short-circuiting centered on the figure of Mary provokes a basic contradiction in the collective psyche. This contradiction is often experienced unconsciously, but sometimes it is perceived consciously and is rejected, especially by women, to whom Mary is presented as a model impossible to imitate. We recommend the reading of this lucid and indispensable book.

How the dogma of the Theotokos came about

Baring and Cashford give the following explanation of the origin of the dogma of Mary as Mother of God:

In approximately the year 431 A.D., in a council held in Ephesus and presided over by Cyril of Alexandria, Mary was proclaimed not only "bearer of Christ", but "bearer of God" (in Greek, Theotokos). What had happened? The position of Mary was by then, in the fourth century, a matter of great concern. Epiphanius, a Church Father, had made a precise distinction: "Mary is to be honored, but the Father, the Son and the Spirit are to be adored." In the fourth century the first council of Constantinople had proclaimed the virginal maternity of Mary as a way of affirming the divinity of Christ: the dogma asserted that there was a suspension of natural laws at the time of his incarnation. Later on, at the beginning of the fifth century, Nestorius, the patriarch of Constantinople, stressed that Christ had two natures, one human and the other divine; this meant that Mary bore Christ in her womb, but could not have borne God. The bishops of Syria were in agreement with Nestorius, but Cyril was not. It was then decided to hold a council in Ephesus to discuss this question. Cyril, however, declared the council open before the Syrian bishops had arrived, and he immediately excommunicated Nestorius, who was not accompanied by anybody who could defend his cause. This was the dubious and very human background of a dogma that would never again be called into question.

Many authors point out an interesting "coincidence": this dogma was proclaimed in Ephesus, a city that was the center of several important religions: the cult to the Great Mother Goddess of the ancestral religions; the cult to the Phrygian deity Cybele, goddess of the Mother Earth, who had been

adored in Anatolia since Neolithic times; and the cult of Artemis, goddess of the hunt (known to the Romans as Diana), who was also a virgin and interceded for her devotees before the other gods.

Interview 20
WALKING ON WATER?

RACHEL This is Emisoras Latinas, reporting to you from the shores of the Sea of Galilee. I am Rachel Perez, special correspondent covering the second coming of Jesus Christ. As on previous occasions, he is with us today in person. Good morning, Jesus!

JESUS A very good morning, I'd say.

RACHEL You seem very happy today. Why is that?

JESUS Just look at this lake and tell me it's not a blessing from the Most High!

RACHEL What a shame that our audience today cannot contemplate the beauty of the Sea of Galilee. I see that his landscape brings back many memories, Jesus.

JESUS It was here that the movement began… James, John and Peter. All of them were good fishermen.

RACHEL And were you?

JESUS No, no, I was afraid of the water. Around Nazareth there's not even a stream.

RACHEL But you couldn't have been afraid because, if I recall correctly, it was it was in this lake where you walked on the waves and calmed the storm by crying out.

JESUS What a story-teller you are, Rachel! I didn't even know how to swim!

RACHEL Story-teller? That story is well known to our radio audience. Please, we want your opinion. Our telephone line is open, 714-4000, seven-one-four-four thousand. Call and tell us did Jesus walk on the water of this Sea of Galilee or didn't he? First call…

MAN Or course he did! That's what's written in the Word of God, and the Word does not lie!

RACHEL And how do you think that miracle was possible?

MAN Because for God nothing is possible. Hallelujah!

RACHEL We have another call…

WOMAN Well, I think everything has to have some explanation. Perhaps it was wintertime and the lake was frozen, so Jesus didn't walk, but skated over the water.

JESUS She has no idea of how hot it is in my land all year round.

RACHEL Blind faith or scientific reason? We have a third call. Hello?

SCHOLAR Neither the one nor the other. The matter is very simple.

RACHEL Why do you say that? Who are you?

SCHOLAR You are a journalist, I am a Bible scholar. Tell me, ma'am, what would your audience think if I were to say to you now "How beautiful you are, your eyes are doves, your hair is like a flock of goats moving down the slopes?"

RACHEL My audience would think that you are quite fresh…

SCHOLAR Correct. But nobody would think that you had birds on your face or goats in your hair, right?

RACHEL I should think not. But… where are you going with this?

SCHOLAR I'm going to the Bible. In the Song of Songs we read "Your eyes are doves, your hair is like a flock of goats". And since the Bible is the Word of God, are we to conclude that that young woman had animals on her head?

RACHEL Of course not. It's an image, a metaphor.

SCHOLAR Well, the same thing applies with Jesus walking on the water. It's a metaphor, a poetic image, a comparison.

RACHEL A comparison with what?

SCHOLAR Look at the lake. Now you see it calm, but sometimes there are terrible storms. Isn't that so, Jesus?

JESUS This fellow knows my land well.

SCHOLAR In those days the country people, and Jesus himself, used to think that during the storms the demons who lived at the bottom of the sea were let loose.

RACHEL I still don't understand.

SCHOLAR Don't we say that a picture is worth a thousand words? Well, the first communities so admired and loved Jesus that they made him into a hero. And this wonderful image occurred to them they had him walk on the water, dominating all the forces of evil that were hidden in its depths. As we might say today, they made him into a superman.

RACHEL And so, Jesus, is it untrue that you walked….?

JESUS Haven't you heard this fellow's explanation? It's a comparison, like the doves and goats that describe the young woman in the Song of Songs.

RACHEL Thank you to our friend, the bible scholar, who has called us. And all of you, dear listeners, are you prepared to find other metaphors in the gospels? Stay tuned to Emisoras Latinas. From the Lake of Galilee, this is Rachel Perez.

MUSIC

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INTERVIEW 20: BACKGROUND MATERIAL

A symbol-making species

"Homo sapiens", the species to which all human beings belong, is characterized by a highly developed brain that allows us, among many other possibilities, to create a symbolic world out of the reality that surrounds us. We are what we are, and we are also what we dream, what we imagine, what we symbolize out of the realities that we see and know. A symbolic text can be more forceful than a merely informative one. It can inspire, explain, and transform. That is precisely where we find the wellspring of all art, and it is also one of the places where religion and religious feelings can take hold and develop.

A symbolic narrative

In the gospels we find historical narratives, catechetical schemas, stories recalling the Old Testament, various traditions, and also many symbols, comparisons and metaphors. The story of Jesus walking on the water is one of the clearest examples of metaphor that we can find.

A terrifying, dangerous sea

In the Palestinian culture of Jesus' time it was believed that the sea was an abyss to which the demons and evil spirits were consigned after being defeated by God at the beginning of the world. The most horrible of them was known as Leviathan, a terribly dangerous monster. This very negative vision of the sea runs through all the pages of the scriptures, right up to the last book of the New Testament: when the Apocalypse describes what the future world will be like, there is no longer any sea! (See Apocalypse 21,1)

The ancient Jewish religious culture viewed God as dominating the sea and the spirits that were in its depths, so that Leviathan was nothing more than a toy for God (Job 40,25-32). Like many of his compatriots, Jesus no doubt feared the waters of the lake and probably didn't know how to swim. He did not walk on the waters, nor did he swim in them. However, in order to show that Jesus had power over evil the evangelist used the metaphor of Jesus walking on the water, and in this way he very effectively communicated that message to the first Christian communities.

The power of metaphors

In the stage play of the Chilean Pablo Skármeta, “The Mailman”, which was made into a movie by Michael Redford (“The Mailman and Pablo Neruda”, 1995), the mailman explains to Neruda: *Metaphors belong not to the people who devise them, but to those that need them.*

The metaphors of the gospels provided the Christian communities with figurative and symbolic tools which they could use to affirm their faith in Jesus and in the idea of God that Jesus proclaimed. If nowadays people try to understand these symbolic comparisons as events that really occurred, and if they read the gospels the way they read the daily newspaper, then they will lose out on the real meaning and the value of those images, and they will nullify the power they have to inspire us. invalidate

Interview 21
MULTIPLICATION OF LOAVES AND FISHES?

RACHEL We have transferred out mobile unit to the spot where the small town of Bethsaida once stood, on the northeastern shore of the Sea of Galilee. Here Jesus Christ performed one of his most famous miracles, the multiplication of the loaves and the fishes. And right here beside us we have Jesus himself, who will tell us exactly what happened that day. Even though much time has passed since then, Jesus, you surely remember the event well.

JESUS Of course I remember! The little band of us crossed the lake in a boat and arrived on this far shore in order to be able to relax together and talk in peace.

RACHEL But there were people waiting here for you.

JESUS Yes, a whole bunch of people anxious to ask questions, discuss things, join forces. So many people and so much enthusiasm … my tongue got out of control.

RACHEL Why do you say that?

JESUS Because I was talking and talking, and before you knew it night was falling, and the people hadn't eaten anything.

RACHEL But couldn't they go and buy something nearby?

JESUS How do you mean? We were far from town, in a very deserted area. Do you think in those solitary places there'd be any stores like the ones we see now?

RACHEL So that was when you performed the miracle.

JESUS Well, actually, I wasn't the one who performed the miracle

RACHEL Then who did it?

JESUS You know how distrustful country people are, right? In my land nobody leaves home without taking along a little food for the journey. But if there are lots of people around, then nobody wants to take out the food out they have for fear there won't be enough.

RACHEL So what did you do?

JESUS I said to them Brothers and sisters, take out what you have there under your tunics, and put it all here in the middle. And don't worry. The first one to break the air of distrust was a young lad. He came forward with five barley loaves and a couple of fish.

RACHEL What then?

JESUS Well, an old lady took out some dates that she had kept hidden away, and somebody else brought some cheese and olives, and somebody more bread. There were a few who resisted, believe me, but in the end everybody had food to eat, and there was enough for all.

RACHEL You mean,… that was all that happened? There wasn't any miracle?

JESUS Of course there was! You don't think it's miraculous when people share like that? That's one of the greatest miracles of all!

RACHEL It seems to me that what's written in the gospels is something quite different from what you just told us. The four gospels all agree that you fed five thousand persons, and that there were twelve baskets of leftovers.

JESUS Well, nobody was counting the people or the baskets, and I've already told you that some of my compatriots love to exaggerate. But it's true, we were all able to eat, and nobody was left hungry.

RACHEL And so … you didn't multiply anything?

JESUS No, that day we added! Among all of us, we added things up! What are you thinking of? A magician pulling loaves and fishes out of a basket? Those kinds of tricks used to be performed by the Samaritans, who were good at charming snakes and swallowing needles.

RACHEL But the miracle…

JESUS The miracle is sharing, Rachel. That's the true miracle, the only miracle.

RACHEL The only miracle? How do you mean the only one? You performed many more. Excuse me, Master, I mean Jesus, but you are not being clear for our audience because…

JESUS What is not at all clear is how we're going to get out of here. If we don't get a move on, night is going to catch us. It will be just like what happened two thousand years ago, and this time neither you nor I have brought any loaves or fishes!

RACHEL In that case, let's go! And those of you who are listening on the radio, don't go away, stay tuned, keep us company. From the place in Galilee where Bethsaida once stood, this is Rachel Perez, Emisoras Unidas.

MUSIC

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INTERVIEW 21: BACKGROUND MATERIAL

Bread, synonym of food

In Jesus' time the basic food of most poor people was bread, almost always made from barley. Their daily diet consisted of bread, water and olive oil. Bread is often a synonym of "food" in the pages of the scriptures: the association of bread with food appears 197 times in the Old Testament and 96 times in the New Testament.

The Sea of Galilee contains 25 species of fish, some of them unique to that lake. The people who lived along its shores supplemented their diet by fishing.

A world still hungry

Even though we now have highly advanced technologies capable of producing sufficient food to feed all the earth's people, a large part of the human race still goes hungry. According to its 2004 annual report, "The State of Food Insecurity in the World", the U.N.'s Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) states that some 852 million people throughout the world suffer from chronic hunger. This means approximately one out of every seven persons.

The FAO report reveals that five million children die annually because of hunger and that every year more twenty million children are born underweight because of their mothers' undernourishment. That makes them more vulnerable to disease and undermines the development of their brain and the body as a whole. As a result of the accelerated concentration of wealth and opportunities in the world, the tendency today is for the number of hungry people, both children and adults, to increase.

One of the Millennium Objectives agreed upon by the heads of state of the world's nations was reducing world hunger by half by the year 2015. That goal is unlikely to be reached.

Combating hunger: a gospel demand

Hunger affects mainly the poorest people. Brazilian theologian Frei Betto was in charge of the "Zero Hunger" program during President Lula's first term in office. When he assumed that responsibility, Betto wrote: *If hunger is the principal cause of premature deaths and the great shame of 21st century civilization, why does it not move people more? The reason for this is a cynical one: in contrast to terrorism, war, cancer, and other illnesses, hunger does make a distinction among classes. It touches only the destitute. And most people generally support campaigns that benefit themselves. We don't always show sensitivity when it is a matter of other people's rights. … "I was hungry and you gave me food," said the Jesus who became flesh in the form of a poor person. Combating hunger is a gospel demand, an ethical imperative, a duty of citizenship and solidarity. It is the only*

way we will free humankind from this prehistoric era we're in, where billions of people are still being deprived of that most elemental animal right: food.

The reasons for hunger in the world

The reason for the world's hunger is the injustice and inequity in the distribution of valuable resources. Humanity will be "given food" only through solidarity, sharing, and a just distribution of those resources. Jesus of Nazareth said as much with this "miracle", and others say so as well, such as the economist Mariana Martínez, speaking on BBC:

While one half the planet consumes daily more than double the calories that are necessary to survive and is anxious about becoming overweight, the other half has nothing to put in its mouth and is dying of hunger. While in the United States those who are not on a "low-carb" diet are out of step, in the favelas of Brazil and the arid areas Sub-Saharan Africa, both children and adults are desperately struggling to find something (no matter what) to fill their stomachs. The dream of a world without hunger can be achieved.

Hunger does not exist in the world because Mother Nature is incapable of providing what is necessary for everybody, or because there is no land to cultivate, or because there are many more people in the world today than a century ago. To the contrary, hunger exists in the world because of poor distribution. One small part of the planet, the part where the richest nations are, consumes more than 80% of the natural resources (food and other basic products) produced in the world, while the rest of the world consumes barely 20%.

The miracle is sharing

The narrative of the multiplication of the loaves and the fishes (Mark 6,30-44) is not the story of a magician performing a spectacular feat. It is a symbolic, catechetical account designed to show the Christian communities the transformative power of an ethic and an attitude of life: that of sharing. When the disciples propose to go to town and "buy with money", Jesus proposes to them "to give what they have". And it is that "giving" that produces the "miracle", so that the food is sufficient for all and everybody is satisfied. In his classic, widely read work, "A Political Reading of the Gospel", Fernando Belo comments: *In this story there is an opposition between two economies: the economy of exchange value (which is dominant today) and the distributive economy, which I would call the economy of use value or the economy of satisfying human needs.*

Interview 22
A DARK-SKINNED JESUS?

RACHEL Our microphones are still located here by blue waters of this pear-shaped Sea of Galilee, and we are again with Jesus Christ, our star guest. We continue with special coverage of his second coming. Good morning, Jesus.

JESUS Good morning to you, Rachel, and to all who are listening to your program.

RACHEL And every day there are more people listening. Our audience is very eager to hear the interviews you've granted to us. I must confess to you that I've always been a radio enthusiast, but now I really miss working for television. I would love for all of you, dear friends of Emisoras Latinas, to be able to see the face of this man. You would certainly be surprised.

JESUS Why surprised?

RACHEL It's that you look different to me. I don't know,… I just wasn't imagining you this way.

JESUS What way do you mean?

RACHEL This way… The thing is, in the films you're not like this. And you're not like this either in the pictures and the holy cards. I don't know how to tell you…

JESUS Well, just tell me.

RACHEL You're… you're … very dark.

JESUS Of course, I came out of my mother.

RACHEL She also was like this, … dark?

JESUS Dark and beautiful, like the young woman of the Song of Songs. Her father, my grandfather Joachim, was even blacker than I am. My whole family on both sides, my father Joseph's and my mother's, turned out with very dark skin.

RACHEL So that dark color was a familial trait?

JESUS No, Rachel, here in Galilee almost everybody in those days had an Abyssinian look to them.

RACHEL Also your stature is a surprise for me. I suppose you know about the Holy Shroud.

JESUS No, I don't know about that.

RACHEL Well, we'll talk about that some other time. But according to that shroud your tunic size should be XL, extra-large.

JESUS What do you mean, extra-large?

RACHEL Very big. But I can see that's not the case. You're almost the same size as me.

JESUS In my time, Rachel, people were not very tall. Besides, our family was very poor, and with the little we ate, we didn't grow to be huge.

RACHEL If our listening audience could get a look at Jesus Christ, they would see that his size is medium, not extra-large. They would also see that his features are not fine and delicate, but rather course. How to put it? You look like a peasant from the backcountry.

JESUS Well, I was a peasant from the backcountry! And proud of it, as my father Joseph taught me to say!

RACHEL And your hair and your eyes… I was picturing you with blue eyes and a blond beard. I thought your hair would be soft, falling over your shoulders. Well, that's the way they always paint you, blond, with golden locks…

JESUS In Galilee, the only things golden were the fields of grain when they were ready for harvest, and the only things blue were the sky and the lake when the weather was good.

RACHEL And so, Mr. Jesus Christ, why do they always draw you to look so different?

JESUS Artists are capricious, Rachel. They invent a world in their own image and likeness.

RACHEL And since in your days there was no photography, they were more inventive, right?

JESUS I'm not sure what you're talking about.

RACHEL Later on I'll explain to you how this little camera works. But first, would you let me take a photo of you, as a souvenir of these interviews and to put on our Internet page?

JESUS Take whatever you wish. What do I have to do?

RACHEL Stand there, with the lake in the background. Okay… Say "cheese".

JESUS Say what?

RACHEL Just smile! That's it! Many thanks. On the shores of Lake Galilee and beside the dark-skinned Jesus Christ, who is smiling for all our audience, this is Rachel Perez, Emisoras Latinas.

MUSIC

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INTERVIEW 22: BACKGROUND MATERIAL

White, blond, western

Since the earliest centuries of Christianity artists of every kind have portrayed Jesus in frescos, paintings, sculptures and manuscript miniatures. Since there were no photographs of Jesus, the artists' portrayals of him came out of their own imagination. In general the features they gave him were like those of western males; indeed, for the most part Jesus was made to look like the "ideal" man of the time in which the artists lived: tall, white, fine-featured.

Since the advent of movies, Jesus has also appeared in many films. He is one of the most portrayed personages in the history of the cinematography. In most films (such as those of Zeffirelli, Scorsese, Gibson…) Jesus is pictured as European and as good-looking as any of the classic stars of the cinema. However, Jesus' Semitic origins suggest that he was dark-skinned and had features more like those of today's Middle Eastern males; he would be nothing like the paintings and film portrayals, in which Jesus appears as a tall, slim, handsome man with clear white skin, blond hair and blue eyes.

The likely face of Jesus

The British network BBC in the year 2001 ran a series titled "The Son of God", in which it conjectured about what Jesus most likely looked like. Their conclusions were reached after a careful investigation directed by a forensic expert from the University of Manchester, Richard Neave. He took a first-century Jewish skull found in Jerusalem and applied several layers of clay to it. With state-of-the-art graphic technology Neave tried to recreate the face that that skull might have had, and in this way he achieved a facial reconstruction that might well be a likeness of the face of Jesus: broad nose, strong chin, arched eyebrows and prominent cheekbones.

The curly hair, short beard and dark skin color were based on the very first paintings of Jesus' face, which were done in Syria. The series was narrated by BBC Middle East correspondent Jeremy Bowen, who stated: *In Jerusalem there are many men who look like this. This is the appearance of an authentic Jew of this region, and even today you can see these features on many men walking through the city.*

Perverse racism

Racism is one of the many expressions of discrimination among human beings. Understanding "race" in terms of external appearance, skin color, and facial features, this discriminatory practice is based on the belief that certain races are superior, that is, more intelligent and more capable than

others. Naturally, because of the hegemony and power which white western European culture has had in the world and because of the influence of western cultural products, racism has determined that what is dark, black, non-white is inferior. After all the horrors of centuries of slavery, racism still exists. After the horrors of the gas chambers during Nazism, there is still racism and the perverse search for a “pure race”.

There is only one race, the human one

Today, with the spectacular advances that have been made in genetics, most scientists reject the concept of “race” and any correlation between intelligence or other aptitudes and physiological characteristics. They consider “race” to be a social concept, not a scientific one, and affirm that all men and women belong to a single race, the human one. They point out that the external features that differentiate human beings from one another correspond to only 0.01% of the human genome.

This means that all of us human beings, whatever our color or physical make-up, have evolved together during the last 100 to 200 thousand years. We all have descended from the same dark-skinned human group that originated in Africa and spread from there to colonize the whole planet. It also means that the differences of color and facial features that we see today in people are due simply to their progressive adaptation to the different climates and environments that they discovered in their migrations. As they moved about, they became “bleached” or differently “colored”, according to the amount of melanin in their skin or the amount of exposure to solar radiation.

Why does racism persist?

Apart from any moral judgments, what does science say about the persistence of racism? Douglas C. Wallace, a professor of molecular genetics at the University of Emory in Atlanta (U.S.A.), explains it this way: *Unfortunately for social harmony, the human brain is exquisitely tuned to the differences of detail in the external form; such sensitivity leads people to exaggerate the importance of what has sometimes been called “race”. The criteria used to determine race are based totally on external characteristics that we are programmed to recognize.*

Wallace states that we are so programmed to recognize and distinguish such superficial characteristics because our survival as a species is highly dependent on our ability to tell one individual from another.

Interview 23
WOMEN APOSTLES?

RACHEL The microphones of Emisoras Latinas are located today on what was once the fishermen's wharf of Capernaum. We are accompanied by Jesus Christ, on another day of his second coming. Jesus, Capernaum, here on the shores of Lake Galilee, was known as your town. Why is that?

JESUS What happened was that I left Nazareth and came to live here.

RACHEL And what made you think of moving to a fishing port?

JESUS Well, here is where Peter, Andrew, James were living… They had their boats and their nets…

RACHEL They were fishermen, but you were not.

JESUS No, I came to fish them! When I returned from the Jordan, I thought something must be done to change things in this country. So I came to Capernaum to look for them.

RACHEL Did they belong to some religious organization?

JESUS Who?

RACHEL Peter, Andrew, James…

JESUS No, they were organized in some kind of resistance against the Romans…

RACHEL So you called them and formed with them the group of the twelve apostles.

JESUS Twelve? We were a lot more than twelve!

RACHEL In your biography it says there were twelve apostles.

JESUS It can't be so because… Let's see, count them James and John, who were sons of Zebedee. Salome, their mother, who also joined the movement. Peter and Andrew, who were brothers. Joanna, the wife of Cusa. Then there was Thomas, the twin. And Mary, the one from Magdala. Also Philip, Suzanne, Nathaniel, Martha and her sister Mary who lived in Bethany, Judas the one from Kariot, who did what he did…

RACHEL Hold on, one minute, because you're confusing our listeners.

JESUS What's so confusing, Rachel?

RACHEL You're mixing the men up with the women, the men who were apostles with …

JESUS With the women who were apostles. What's wrong with that?

RACHEL Well, that's confusing, because it's always been clear that you chose only men to form your church.

JESUS And what Essenian told you that? In our group there were all kinds, women, men, people from Judea, from Galilee, there was even a Samaritan woman who snuck in.

RACHEL Let's get things straight. Those women that you mention went with your group … as logistical support.

JESUS What does that mean?

RACHEL That is, they made the food, washed the clothes … perhaps they even helped the preachers relax.

JESUS What are you talking about, Rachel? The women were the best of all for talking to the people and getting them excited. They were also the best for organizing people. They did the same work as everybody, the same as the men.

RACHEL But, then, … Wait, we have a call … Hello?

RENATO [with Portuguese accent] This is Renato Souza de Almeida speaking. I work in youth ministry in Sao Paulo, Brazil.

RACHEL Well, speak slowly so that we can understand you well.

JESUS Jesus is right. If you don't think so, read the letter of Saint Paul, where he tells how he worked with Junia, with Lydia, the one who sold purple cloth, with Evodia, with Phoebe, with Apia. Paul worked with a whole lot of women in the first Christian communities.

RACHEL Much obliged, Renato. But then, if that was the way things began … Have you observed the situation now, Jesus? Have you noticed how your representatives nowadays reject women as priests, as pastors, as bishops? Why do you think they act that way?

JESUS I don't know, really, perhaps out of fear. Maybe they feel small next to women and don't want to recognize it.

RACHEL If I understand well, then,… would you be in agreement with having women priests?

JESUS I'm not in agreement with any kind of priest business, neither for men nor for women. But for guiding communities, women are wiser and also more responsible. It's for that reason that God confided the most important message, the most precious pearl, to a woman, not a man.

RACHEL What pearl are you talking about?

JESUS Why don't we go look for her in Magdala? Do you want to come? Let's go, it's not far.

RACHEL Yes, let's go! Listening audience, you're tuned to Emisoras Latinas on the road to Magdala. This report has come from your special correspondent, Rachel Perez.

MUSIC

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INTERVIEW 23: BACKGROUND MATERIAL

Fishermen: poor and despised

In Jesus' time Capernaum, of which only ruins remain, was a city of about three square kilometers and a few thousand inhabitants. Fishing was the principal way of earning a living there, as in all the cities and villages that were near the Sea of Galilee. Many fishermen worked for a boss, but some organized cooperatives or formed a family business. In those days fishing was a despised trade since the fishermen spent so much time on the seas or lakes, which for the religious culture of the time were considered malevolent places: demons were thought to dwell in their depths.

The number 12: a symbol

Although Jesus may have had twenty disciples in his closest group, or eighteen, or any other number, those who wrote the gospels mention the names of only twelve, which is a symbolic number. The number 12 had a special meaning in Israel: it symbolized totality and represented the whole people of God. There were twelve sons of Jacob, the patriarchs who gave their names to the twelve tribes that populated the Promised Land.

When the evangelists wrote their gospels, they decided to use that same symbol: the new people of God was also beginning with "twelve" founders, heirs of the ancient twelve tribes. We find the symbolism of the number 12 all the way up to the last book of the Bible, in which the definitive number of the people of God at the end of time is said be 144,000 (12 X 12 X 1000 = the totality of totalities).

A movement with many women

There is no doubt that in Jesus' group "many women" took an active part (Luke 8,3). Besides his mother Mary, we know the names of some of them: Mary Magdalene, several other Marys, Suzanne, Salome, Martha and Mary of Bethany, Joanna… The first Christian communities continued this tradition: men and women met and worshiped together, both men and women preached the message

of Jesus with the same authority, and both men and women presided at the celebration in remembrance of him. Like the men, the women had representation and decision-making power in the communities as priests and bishops.

In her book, *Mary, a Flesh-and-Blood Biography of the Virgin Mother* (Bloomsbury, 2005), the British journalist and Middle Eastern expert, Lesley Hazleton, gives some very interesting information about two spiritual movements, existing before and after Jesus' time, which placed women on a par with men as regards positions of power and decision-making. One of the movements was known as "the therapeutics" and the other as "the mountaineers", and during the first Christian centuries they had much influence on the Christian movement. Hazleton also describes a movement made up only of women: the Coliridians.

Women collaborators of Paul

Despite the misogyny of Paul, which derived from his experience with the Jewish sect of the Pharisees, he affirmed that *in Christ there is no male or female* (Galatians 3,28). With this claim he legitimized the active participation of women in the first Christian communities. Also, he makes emphatic mention of many women in his letters and lavishly praises their work. For example, he singles out the deaconess Phoebe (Romans 16,1), Junia (Romans 16,7), Prisca, Julia, Evodia and Sintece, all of whom he called his "collaborators" (Philippians 4,2). He also mentions Claudia, Trifena, Trifosa, Prisca, Lyida, Tiatira and Nympha of Laodicea. Of the 28 persons to whom Paul accords special praise in his letters to the early churches, 10 are women.

The case of Junia is special and symptomatic. For many centuries here name was disguised beneath a masculine name: Junias. Since Paul had given the title of apostle to this woman, who was the wife of Andronicus, the scribes who copied the letter considered such an attribution impossible, so they added an "S" to the name Junia, thus transforming it into a diminutive of the masculine name "Junianus".

Fourth century: a dramatic reversal

In the fourth century, with the "conversion" of Constantine, Christianity became the official religion of the empire, and women's participation in the church gradually disappeared. The Spanish theologian José María Marín explains what happens: *Primitive Christianity was much more involved with the family than with governing as a public function; consequently, women played a more important role in organizing the communities and the house churches. It was only at a later stage, when Christianity passed into the public, political sphere, that men took active control away from women.*

Lesley Hazleton gives the following analysis: *When orthodoxy was established and Christianity acquired official recognition and political power, the role of women was severely restricted, for religion was perhaps a sphere common to men and women, but politics was strictly for men.* She cites the U.S. Baptist theologian Harvey Cox, who in his book *Seduction of the Spirit* characterizes this dramatic reversal in Christianity as *the most successful attempt in history on the part of a hierarchy to divert, deactivate and control feminine religious symbolism.*

The patriarchal architecture of the cathedrals

The architecture of the great European cathedrals reflected the misogynous ideology that prevailed in Christianity for centuries. A suggestive and surprising text is the prologue to Eve Ensler's famous "Vagina Monologues". In it the U.S. feminist Gloria Steinem asserts:

In the sixties, while I was doing research in the Library of Congress, I found a little known treatise about the history of religious architecture which blithely stated a thesis, as it were known by everybody, to the effect that the traditional shape of most patriarchal buildings of worship imitates the female body. Thus, there is an external entrance and another internal one, the labia majora and the labia minora; there is a vaginal central nave, which leads to the altar; there are two curved ovarian structures on either side; and finally, in the sacred center is the altar or uterus, where the great miracle takes place: men give birth.

Though this comparison was new for me, it opened my eyes with a shock. Of course, I thought. The central ceremony of the patriarchal religions is nothing else but the ceremony in which men take control of the "yoni" power of creation by giving birth symbolically. It is no wonder that male religious leaders state so often that we human beings are born in sin … because we are born from female tummies. Only by obeying the rules of the patriarchy can we be "reborn" through men. It is no wonder that priests and pastors decked out in long vestments sprinkle our heads with a fluid that mimics the waters of birth. It is no wonder that they give us new names and promise us we will be reborn in eternal life. It is no wonder that the male priesthood attempts to keep women far removed from the altar, just as we are kept far removed from control of our own powers of reproduction. Whether symbolic or real, everything is aimed at controlling the power that resides in the female body.

A misogynist church

Despite Jesus' own practice and despite the practice of the original Christian communities, the Catholic Church has been fiercely opposed to the ordination of women for centuries, right up to our own day. In May 1994 Pope John Paul II published a document, ratified by the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith in 1995, in which he stated that the ordination of women was no longer to be discussed: *I declare that the Church in no way has the ability to confer priestly ordination on women and that this declaration should be considered definitive by all the faithful.* The last statement of this position was that of the then cardinal, now Supreme Pontiff, Joseph Ratzinger, in his "Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Collaboration of Men and Women in the Church and in the World." Published in October 2004, this text expresses the extreme and profound misogyny of official Catholicism.

Interview 24:
THE BELOVED DISCIPLESS?

RACHEL Our mobile unit is located today in what was once Magdala, the town that was home to Mary Magdalene, as her name itself testifies. Now there is nothing left of the town but ruins. Again we have with us Jesus Christ, coming for a second time to earth and revisiting these places for the first time.

JESUS I came through here when this city was very lively. The Capernaum folks used to bring their fish here, where they salted it and then sold it all about the country. It was a city that had some famous rich people, and therefore also many poor folk.

RACHEL It was here that you met Mary Magdalene?

JESUS Yes, I met her here. She was very poor.

RACHEL Can you tell us the circumstances?

JESUS Well, she was a woman who lived alone. In my time women who were on their own, such as widows and wives rejected by their husbands, had a very tough life.

RACHEL What about her work? According to tradition, she was a prostitute.

JESUS That's pure gossip. Sadly, women who were on their own always had to put up with the burden of a bad reputation. I remember that day… After walking along the shore of the lake, we arrived here in Magdala with John and Andrew. That was when I met Mary. She listened keenly and heard the message of God's Reign.

RACHEL Was that after you cast the demons out of her?

JESUS What demons! Gossipmongers! People were saying that she had not one, but seven demons in her body. Since Mary was a strong woman and spoke her mind clearly, people invented tales about her.

RACHEL I imagine you must have heard that they've written a lot about the relations between you and Mary Magdalene. Are those just tales also?

JESUS Well, I don't know what they've written, but … How should I tell you? She took part in our movement, she went everywhere with us, she was passionate about God's Kingdom. Finding Mary was like finding a pearl of great value. Her eyes gave light to her whole body. She was full of joy. For her the Kingdom was a banquet, a great feast.

RACHEL You remember her with great affection.

JESUS I loved to talk with her. I confided many things to her. Andrew, John, James, and especially Peter used to get jealous.

RACHEL Look, Jesus, I am going to say some things that maybe… Well, I'll just say them! And they're not things I found in any novel or in *The DaVinci Code*.

JESUS The what code?

RACHEL To prepare for this interview I read some of those apocryphal gospels, the ones that don't appear in our Bible. And one of them says that Mary Magdalene was your companion, that you kissed her on the mouth. I've also read that that "beloved disciple" who appears so much in John's gospel was in reality a "beloved discipless", the woman you loved most.

JESUS Well, in fact, all that was written in memory of her.

RACHEL But did you… did you love her?

JESUS Yes, I loved her very much.

RACHEL You loved her … as a woman?

JESUS What do you want to know, Rachel? If I went to bed with her?

RACHEL Please pardon me the question. I understand that it's rather indiscrete, but there's so much mystery about your relation with Mary Magdalene.

JESUS Love is always a mystery. It's for that reason that God, the greatest Love, is the greatest of mysteries.

RACHEL So you and she… that is, between the two of you…?

JESUS In my land they say, "Among three people there are no secrets." Don't ask any more questions, Rachel, there's no need.

RACHEL Ahem… From the ruins of the city where Jesus of Nazareth and Mary of Magdala met for the very first time, this is Rachel Perez of Emisoras Latinas.

MUSIC

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INTERVIEW 24: BACKGROUND MATERIAL

Saint Mary Magdalene

While eastern Christianity has traditionally honored Mary Magdalene for her closeness to Jesus and considers her “equal to the apostles”, in the West the idea developed that Mary, before knowing Jesus, had worked as a prostitute, and she was identified with other “sinful” women who appear in the gospels (Luke 7,36-50).

The image of a repentant and penitent Mary Magdalene has dominated western art and literature. In 1969 the Catholic Church, which recognizes her as a saint, removed from its liturgical calendar the designation “penitent”, which had traditionally been applied to her, and stopped using that Lukan gospel text in the masses. Despite these changes the vision of Mary Magdalene as the repentant prostitute still prevails.

A woman vindicated

Mary was born in the city of Magdala, on the shores of Sea of Galilee, and she is mentioned by name four times in the synoptic gospels (Mark, Matthew and Luke). Tradition has identified her with several anonymous women and with other “Marys” who appear in the gospel accounts.

The fact that Mary Magdalene is presented as the first witness of the resurrection of Jesus in the fourth gospel (John 20,1-18) indicates the importance of this woman in the Jesus movement and in the earliest Christian community. Nowadays almost all serious exegesis rejects the idea that Mary Magdalene was a prostitute and stresses the exceptional role this woman played in the life of Jesus. Some rather bold hypotheses are put forward, for example, that she was the author of the fourth gospel, usually attributed to the apostle John; or that “the beloved disciple” mentioned in the fourth gospel was in reality “the beloved discipless”; or, most controversially, that she was Jesus’ lover.

Author of the fourth gospel and “beloved discipless”

The Catholic priest Ramón K. Jusino has developed the theory that Mary Magdalene was the author of the fourth gospel and that the “beloved disciple” mentioned several times in that text was not John, but Mary. Jusino bases his hypothesis on a book written by the Catholic theologian and biblical scholar Raymond E. Brown, who proposes that this gospel represents the tradition of a very early community of followers of Jesus that was led by Mary Magdalene. Both Jusino and Brown draw on texts from the apocryphal gospels to corroborate their theories.

See: http://ramon_k_jusino.tripod.com/magdalena.html
See: Raymond Brown, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple: The Life, Loves and Hates of an Individual Church in New Testament Times* (Paulist, 1978).

Mary Magdalene in the apocryphal gospels

The four gospels included in the New Testament were composed from accounts that were originally transmitted orally and only afterwards written down. Other “gospels” (that is, texts describing the message and deeds of Jesus) evolved in the same way. In 1945 a large collection of early Christian

codices were discovered in Nag Hammadi (Egypt); most of them were Gnostic texts ("gnosis" means knowledge in Greek), and included among them were several so-called Apocryphal Gospels ("apocryphal" means they are not recognized as part of the official canon of the New Testament).

These texts were rejected by the Church Fathers in the first centuries of the Christian era since they were not considered "orthodox", that is, they were not thought to be authentic and trustworthy. Mary Magdalene is given more prominence in these texts than in the synoptic gospels. The "Gospel of Philip" mention her as the "companion" of Jesus: *There were three persons who walked continually with the Lord: his mother Mary, her sister, and Magdalene, who was called his companion.* Another fragment of that same gospel reads thus: *And the companion of the Savior is Mary Magdalene. He loved her more than any of his followers and kissed her on the mouth. The rest of his followers saw how he loved Mary and said to him: Why do you love her more than you love any of us?*

Included among the apocryphal gospels is also the "Gospel of Mary Magdalene", which stresses the important role this woman played and mentions how the male disciples rejected her because of her closeness to Jesus: *When Mary had said this, she fell silent, since it was to this point that the Savior had spoken with her. But Andrew answered and said to the brethren, "Say what you wish to say about what she has said. I at least do not believe that the Savior said this. For certainly these teachings are strange ideas." Peter answered and spoke concerning these same things. He questioned them about the Savior: "Did he really speak secretly with a woman without our knowledge? Are we to turn about and all listen to her? Did he prefer her to us?"*

Then Mary wept and said to Peter, "My brother Peter, what do you think? Do you think that I thought this up myself in my heart, or that I am lying about the Savior?" Levi answered and said to Peter, "Peter, you have always been hot-tempered. Now I see you contending against the woman as the adversaries do. But if the Savior made her worthy, who are you indeed to reject her? Surely the Savior knows her very well. That is why he loved her more than us. Rather let us be ashamed and put on the perfect man and acquire him for ourselves as he commanded us, and preach the gospel, not laying down any other rule or other law beyond what the Savior said. When they finished discussing, they began to go forth to proclaim and to preach the gospel according to Mary.

A valuable hypothesis

We should consider quite valuable all the theological and literary hypotheses that highlight so beautifully and so justly the role that Mary Magdalene played in the life of Jesus (among the best known are Nikos Kazantzakis's *The Last Temptation* and Dan Brown's *The DaVinci Code*). Although we will never be able to prove whether Mary was the wife of Jesus or not, or whether any children were born of such a union, we recognize this hypothesis and take it into account because it opens up a magnificent path to questioning and rejecting the traditional misogyny of the Christian churches, especially the Catholic Church. Furthermore, it leads us to a vital reflection: What would really change in Jesus' message, what would change in the revolutionary idea of God that Jesus proclaimed, if he had been the sexual partner of Mary, the woman from Magdala?

Interview 25
POOR IN SPIRIT?

RACHEL: Our mobile unit has traveled today to the Mount of the Beatitudes, a few kilometers from Capernaum. And with us we have Jesus Christ, whom we will interview once again for Emisoras Latinas. All these interviews can be found on our Web page. Jesus, what feelings do you experience here, in this place where you pronounced one of your most unforgettable discourses?

JESUS: Deeply moved, I must say, Rachel.

RACHEL: According to research I have done, on this mountain you spoke of the law and the prophets, of placing ourselves in the hands of providence, of the efficacy of prayer, of the golden rule…

JESUS: I don't know if I spoke of so many things, but I do remember that I uttered the most important message about God's Reign.

RACHEL: You're doubtlessly referring to the beatitudes, because this mountain is named for them, the Mount of the Beatitudes.

JESUS: It had rained heavily a few nights before, I remember… Hail had fallen. The farmers lost their harvest – they lost everything. The landlords didn't want to open up their granaries; the lenders were sharpening their fangs.

RACHEL: And in that difficult situation you got the people together and spoke to them.

JESUS: Yes, there were a lot of people, and they were desperate. The children had no food, the widows were begging for alms…

RACHEL: That was when you promised them the kingdom of heaven.

JESUS: What do you mean, the kingdom of heaven?

RACHEL: That is, you told them that after this vale of tears they would enter into the kingdom of heaven, isn't that what you said?

JESUS: No, I never said that.

RACHEL: You said: Blessed are the poor in spirit because…

JESUS: No, no, no. I said "Blessed are the poor." Just that. The really poor.

RACHEL: But … but in one of the gospels, I think it's Matthew's, you refer to the poor in spirit.

JESUS: Well, perhaps my friend Matthew was playing tricks with my words, and he was surely with well-intentioned, but he distorted what I said.

RACHEL: So you weren't referring to people with humble hearts?

JESUS: I was referring to poor people, to hungry people, to those who weep from the cold. To the homeless, the landless, the jobless. To those of us who don't have any bread to put in our mouths.

RACHEL: "Those of us"? Were you including yourselves among those poor people?

JESUS: Yes, I was one of many. I also knew hunger. That's why they said to me, "Physician, cure yourself!" Because I was a poor devil without a cent in my pocket … and me talking about the liberation of the poor!

RACHEL: Liberation in the kingdom of heaven, in the great beyond.

JESUS: No, Rachel. Liberation on earth, in the great here and now.

RACHEL: Can you explain that better?

JESUS: I spoke about the Reign of God, but as far as I can see, they understood some kingdom in heaven.

RACHEL: But what's the difference? I don't see it.

JESUS: The difference is that heaven is way up there and very far away. The kingdom of heaven is a promise for later on, a consolation for after death.

RACHEL: And wasn't that what you preached so much about?

JESUS: Quite the contrary, Rachel. The Reign of God is for right now, for today. It's not for the other life, it's for this life.

RACHEL: What else did Jesus Christ say on this mountain? What is the meaning of the Reign of God? We'll take a short commercial break and then continue live from the Mount of the Beatitudes. Rachel Perez. Emisoras Latinas. Go ahead, studios!

MUSIC

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INTERVIEW 25: BACKGROUND MATERIAL

Neither a list of commands nor consolation for the future

The Mount of the Beatitudes is a hill situated a few kilometers from Capernaum. At its summit there is an eight-sided church, in memory of the eight beatitudes recorded in Matthew's gospel. This is one of the most famous and familiar of the messages of Jesus of Nazareth, and it is perhaps the one that best captures the essence of his theology.

Sometimes the "beatitudes" are interpreted as a list of norms of conduct: "one should" be poor, "one should" be merciful, etc. This moralistic interpretation misrepresents the contents of this "good news", which was addressed to the poor, to the losers, to the powerless. The beatitudes are not moral norms, and much less are they formulas of consolation for people who are having a tough time in this life, telling them to suffer patiently because things will get better in the "great beyond".

God takes the side of the poor

Blessed are the poor is the one beatitude that sums up all the rest. Jesus called the poor blessed because he was announcing to them that God was on their side, and because the poor, once they were convinced that God was really concerned about their misery, would unite among themselves and would cease to be poor. Jesus did not call the poor "blessed" because they behaved well or because they put up with their misery without complaining. He called them "blessed" simply because they were poor. The good news that he announced to them was that they were God's favorites, not because they were morally good, but because they were poor. God, as the Just One, wants there to be justice on earth, and he passionately wants poor people to escape from their poverty.

The poor and the poor "in spirit"

There has been much speculation and argument about who the poor people were that Jesus was referring to in the beatitudes. The text of Luke (Luke 6,20-26) speaks simply of "the poor", while that of Matthew (Matthew 5,1-12) speaks of "the poor in spirit". Luke is drawing on an earlier, more primitive tradition than is Matthew. The poor people whom Jesus addressed were those who really had nothing, those who really suffered hunger. Matthew's later version, which speaks of the "poor in spirit", recalls phrases that had been used by the Old Testament prophets, who spoke of the "humble spirit" of the "anawim" (poor people).

The Hebrew word "anawim" had the basic meaning of "distressed, defenseless, desperate"; it referred to men and women who knew they were in God's hands because they were rejected by the powerful; they were the people who were marginalized both by the temple-based religion and by the imperial political system. While Luke stresses the aspect of external oppression, Matthew highlights the aspect of interior distress experienced by those suffering that external oppression. Neither of them, however, speaks of "rich people who are poor in spirit".

Matthew and Luke were writing for different publics. The communities for which Luke wrote were made up mainly of men and women oppressed by the powerful structures of the Roman empire: slaves, people living in cities with enormous social differences, people worn down by the harsh

conditions of their lives. Matthew wrote for Jewish communities which were still being tempted by Pharisaic tendencies, which made them believe that the only good people were those who were "decent", those who observed the law strictly. For Matthew the "poor of spirit" were those considered sinners, that is, people whom the "righteous" would look upon as immoral or disreputable.

Despite their different approaches, both evangelists wanted to point out the prophetic dimension of Jesus' words: God bestows his Kingdom on the poor of the world. On the really poor. The message of Jesus as stated in the beatitudes was a truly revolutionary one in the history of religions. Besides stating that moral norms were not of great importance as criteria for God's benevolence, Jesus was announcing that in the world's historic conflicts God was most definitely on the side of those at the bottom.

One poor person among many

Jesus was poor, as poor as the neighbors to whom he was announcing the beatitudes. Jesus was not a religious teacher who "became poor", who feigned poverty, so that poor people would understand him better, nor was he trying to be a sign of divine condescension toward those who lived in misery. Such an idea betrays the very essence of the Christian message, which affirms that Jesus was a poor man from the rural village of Nazareth, who spoke to us of God in a loud and clear voice, establishing beyond a doubt that if justice is not done to the poor there can be no real knowledge of God. Jesus taught us that it is not "outside the church" that "there is no salvation", but "outside the poor". (See this central idea of the gospel developed in the essay "Outside the poor there is no salvation", written by the Salvadoran theologian Jon Sobrino; the text may be found at www.envio.org.ni.)

Interview 26
KINGDOM ON EARTH?

RACHEL Once again we're in contact with our studios at Emisoras Latinas. We find ourselves still here on the Mount of the Beatitudes, alongside the beautiful Lake Galilee, and we continue our interviews with Jesus Christ, who many years ago pronounced in this very same place one of the most important discourses in the history of humankind.

JESUS I don't know if it was all that important, Rachel, because I was just repeating what all the prophets had already declared centuries before.

RACHEL Let's go back to the words you used. When you said "Blessed are the poor", you were referring to… to…

JESUS To the poor. There's no need to go around in circles – or else you're going to get seasick, like when you sail far from shore.

RACHEL Yes, but…

JESUS Rachel, it's very simple. God gets infuriated when he sees how things are going in this world.

RACHEL Because of the many sins people commit…

JESUS The greatest of all sins, do you know what it is? It's when rich people eat twice as much as they need and leave poor Lazarus outside with his plate empty.

RACHEL I remember a parable of yours that talks about that.

JESUS God becomes furious when he sees so many injustices – little boys without a crust of bread, starving to death; little girls without a decent dress to cover themselves, dying of cold… That is the world's great sin. God refuses to put up with such a situation.

RACHEL Some people would take that as a political statement.

JESUS It's bound to sound that way to them, because I proclaimed the arrival of God's Kingdom on earth, not in heaven. It is a kingdom of justice, where nobody goes without as long as others have in abundance. And I declared that God takes sides in this struggle.

RACHEL What does that mean exactly, that God takes sides?

JESUS God fights on our side, the side of the poor. You don't remember when the disciples of John the Baptist came to see me? They wanted to know who I was and whether my

message was from God. I told them Go and tell John that I am announcing the good news to the poor.

RACHEL Well, announce it now to our audience. What is that good news?

JESUS The good news of yesterday and today is that God wants the poor to be poor no longer. The good news is that they are going to stop being poor, that they are going to be freed from their poverty, that the hungry will have food to eat!

RACHEL Some people will claim that such a message is too materialistic.

JESUS For someone who is hungry, nothing is more spiritual than a piece of bread. When a hungry person eats, he chews on God in every grain. No, the good news is not that the poor will go up to the kingdom of heaven, it's that the kingdom of heaven will come down to the poor. The good news is not a promise for tomorrow, it's a blessing for today. Now is the time.

RACHEL All this you're saying is very different from what many people preach in the churches.

JESUS I don't know what they might be preaching nowadays, but they've told me that the disciples of the first communities lived with that spirit. They shared everything together, they owned everything in common.

RACHEL Why is it that the first Christians understood this, but so many people now don't understand?

JESUS Many people were scandalized by me. They changed my words, they sweetened them. And worst of all, they forgot the second part of the discourse that I spoke here, on this very mountain.

RACHEL There's a second part?

JESUS Yes, do you want to hear it?

RACHEL Of course, Mr. Jesus Christ, but after a short commercial break. Rachel Perez. Emisoras Latinas, broadcasting from the Mount of the Beatitudes. Go ahead, studios!

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INTERVIEW 26: BACKGROUND MATERIAL

In the tradition of the prophets

The beatitudes proclaimed by Jesus as good news for the poor continued the tradition of the great prophets of Israel, for whom the poverty caused by oppression and exploitation was a scandal that offended against life and therefore against the will of God. The prophets taught that the poverty of "the widows and orphans" – who were emblematic of misery and marginalization in those days – had to be rejected, combated and eliminated if people wanted to be faithful to God. That was what the law and the prophets preached, and what Jesus preached also. For them poverty was not seen as a fated destiny, but as the consequence of the power that some human beings had over others.

Lazarus and the rich man

One of Jesus' most famous parables is that of the rich man and the poor Lazarus (Luke 16,19-31). It is typical of the narratives found in all cultures which express people's indignation in the face of injustices and their desire that God bring about justice for the poor.

God in every grain

The Korean feminist theologian Chung Hyun Kung, in her book *Struggle to be the Sun Again* (Orbis Books, 1990), gives the following summary of the ideas of a poor woman living in a famine-stricken zone of India:

Without food there is no life. When people who are starving to death eat, they experience God in every grain of food. They know and taste God when they chew each grain. Food gives them life. For those who are starving the greatest love of God is food. When a grain from the earth sustains life, they discover the meaning of the phrase: "This is the way God loved the world: he sent his beloved Son." When God gives them food through other dedicated human beings, God gives them his beloved Son, Jesus Christ.

Liberation theology

Liberation theology, which developed in Latin America during the sixties and seventies, used the beatitudes as a key text for promoting and developing a revolutionary interpretation and practice of Jesus' message. As the only predominantly Christian region of the Third World and as the continent with the greatest inequality between rich and poor, it was fitting and proper that Latin America should be the place where Jesus' original message on behalf of the poor was rescued by theologians, communities, organizations, religious, and even bishops.

Latin American liberation theology developed many different perspectives in its efforts to free Christian theology from its Eurocentric captivity, and of course it provoked challenges to the doctrinal, spiritual and moral hegemony of the Roman Catholic church in the continent.

Liberation theology understands theology not as a theoretical exercise, but as a critical reflection on our practice or way of life. Such theology is understood not as a mere affirmation or recitation of truths, but as taking a stand before questions of life and death. Liberation theology places human welfare at the center of its concerns, and it finds in our human reality, especially the injustices people

commit against one another, not only an object of analysis, but also the grounds for commitment. It places more importance on “orthopraxis” (right practice) than on “orthodoxy” (right thinking). It understands history as a permanent process by which humanity moves forward, toward collective and individual liberation, and it proposes that Christians should participate actively in that history by prophetically denouncing injustices and announcing the way of liberation. Liberation theology promotes consciousness-raising evangelization that allows people to pass from a magical, providentialist understanding of reality to a critical consciousness that is fully committed to the cause of justice and peace.

Liberation theology rescues the real Jesus of history and gives a profound embodiment to the political dimension of his message. It recovers and renews the preaching of the great Old Testament prophets. It places more emphasis on structural sin than on individual sins. It insists that our relationship with our neighbor, especially our poor neighbor, is the center of Christian faith, and it teaches that being “converted” to our neighbor is the ultimate meaning of spirituality.

Interview 27
THE RICH ACCURSED?

RACHEL The microphones of Emisoras Latinas are still here on the Mount of the Beatitudes. Before us we have a panoramic view of the Sea of Galilee, and with us again, in an exclusive interview, is Jesus Christ. In an earlier segment, Jesus, you referred to the second part of the historic discourse you gave on this mountain. What did you speak of in that second part?

JESUS Well, first of all I blessed the poor people and congratulated them.

RACHEL And after that?

JESUS After that I cursed the rich people.

RACHEL You… cursed?

JESUS Yes, I cursed the rich people.

RACHEL Can you repeat your words for us?

JESUS I said it then, and I say it now Woe to you who are rich, who are well-fed, because you will go hungry. Woe to you who laugh and make fun of the poor, because very soon you will weep and cry out when God empties your coffers, when God rips off your clothes and your jewelry and leaves you without bread and without money to buy anything, just as you did with your workers!

RACHEL Those are very hard words.

JESUS Much harder is the heart of stone of people who don't want to share.

RACHEL Perhaps there are people listening to us now who are wealthy but also generous – people of humble spirit. Would you curse them also?

JESUS Once a rich young man with a good heart wanted to join our band. He wanted to put his hand on the plow of God's Kingdom.

RACHEL And what did you tell him?

JESUS You have to choose either God or money. If you want to join us, first share out your wealth among the poor.

RACHEL If those were the conditions… I don't think many rich people would have taken part in your movement.

JESUS A few understood, but the truth is that in those days, as in these, it's easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God.

RACHEL Your message doesn't sound politically correct. Don't you feel it's too radical?

JESUS Radical, yes. We took the axe to the root, because the root was rotten.

RACHEL They have always taught me that you were meek and humble of heart, but now I find you a little … how to say it? … a little intolerant.

JESUS God does not tolerate injustice, Rachel. In the end God will not ask us about rites or prayers, God won't ask us about fasting and temples. We will be examined only regarding our justice, and God will be relentless with those who are unjust.

RACHEL You're quite stirred up …

JESUS Didn't you ask me to recall what I said on this mountain?

RACHEL Even so, could we close off our program by restating that your message is really a message of peace?

JESUS God's message is fire upon the earth, and I can't wait till it's blazing! Listen, Rachel, if every morning of your life you don't earnestly desire for there to be an end to wars, violence, lies, envy, power-mongering, then you'll never understand my message.

RACHEL Is there anything else you'd like to add?

JESUS Look toward the horizon, Rachel. In these very days in which you're living, I see signs in the heaven that announce a storm coming. Let those who have eyes to see observe the signs, and let those who have ears to hear listen to what's going on.

RACHEL We are talking with Jesus Christ in his second coming to our modern world, which is ever more unequal – and therefore ever more violent. The Mount of the Beatitudes, Rachel Perez, Emisoras Latinas.

MUSIC

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INTERVIEW 27: BACKGROUND MATERIAL

Woe to you who are rich

In Jesus' time the Pharisees considered sinners to be "cursed" or "condemned" by God (that is, not blessed by God, distant from God). And for them the "sinners" or "impure" included sick people, women, tax-collectors (publicans), prostitutes, and anyone who did not obey the Law and the rules and rites that the Pharisees determined to be pleasing to God. Jesus, however, did not follow such religious criteria, nor did he curse or condemn any of those "sinners". Rather, he cursed the rich with his famous "Woe to you" sayings (Lucas 6,24-26).

Camels and needles

The rich young man of the gospel narrative (Luke 18,18-25) received from Jesus not a "counsel" for leading a "life of perfection", as the story is sometimes interpreted. Rather, he received a radical proposal: the only way to enter the Kingdom of God is by sharing one's wealth and adopting the perspective of the poor. On that occasion Jesus drove home his point with a hyperbolic comparison: he said that it was easier for the largest animal he knew of (a camel) to pass through one of the smallest objects "manufactured" in those days (a needle) than for a rich man to enter into the Kingdom that he was preaching.

James also cursed them

James, the brother of Jesus and leader of the Jerusalem church after the death of Jesus, followed his brother's tradition and spoke also with great severity against the rich. In the letter of James, the "curse" that he hurls against them begins like this: *You who are rich, weep and wail over the miserable fate descending upon you. Your riches have rotted; your fine clothes are moth-eaten.* (James 5,1-6).

The Church Fathers and the rich

The "social" teaching of the first Church Fathers continued the radical tradition of the prophets of Israel and of Jesus. It can be summed up simply: those who possess wealth are only its administrators, and all wealth should be shared with the poor so that they cease to be poor.

There are abundant texts to that effect. For example, in his "Homily against Wealth" Saint Basil states: *Anyone who deprives a man of his clothes is a thief. What other name is there for someone who does not clothe the nakedness of a poor person when he can do so? The bread you have stored away belongs to the hungry. You should give to the naked that coat you have hidden away in your closet, to the barefoot those shoes that are rotting in your house, and to the destitute the silver you have secreted away.*

Saint Ambrose claimed that when rich people give to the poor, they are doing nothing more than making restitution: *What you share with the poor is not your property. You are simply returning to the poor part of what belongs to them, because you are usurping for yourselves alone what was given to all, for the use of all. The land belongs to everybody, not just to the rich.* (Homily on Naboth the poor man)

Saint Augustine states very clearly that *what is given to the poor is a debt paid in the name of justice. God's first intention was to grant everything to everybody.*

And Saint John Chrysostom asserts: *God never made some people rich and other people poor. God gave the same land for everybody. All the earth is the Lord's, and the fruits of the earth should belong to everybody.*

Becoming brothers, becoming human

Faithful to the message of Jesus, liberation theology denounces those who accumulate wealth by exploiting the sweat of their neighbors, and it announces the kingdom of equality and justice – and also struggles to bring it about.

The "option for the poor" is a key concept in liberation theology, but making such an option requires us to understand that it is not possible to love all people equally, that the accumulation of riches is unchristian and destructive of fraternal solidarity, and that the accumulation of suffering is also unchristian and destructive of humanity. Loving rich people and oppressors means challenging them and combating them – even cursing them – so that they will change and learn to be true brothers and sisters. On the other hand, loving poor and oppressed people means supporting them in their struggle to free themselves so their lives can be fully human.

Interview 28
TRESPASSES OR DEBTS?

RACHEL Today our microphones are installed in Tabgha, the hill of the seven springs, near Capernaum. It was Jesus Christ himself who suggested this site to us. Why do you prefer this place, Jesus?

JESUS Many memories… I came here many times, at night, to pray…

RACHEL But since you are God himself, praying would mean talking to yourself…

JESUS I don't know what you're talking about, Rachel. How am I going to talk to myself? I was talking with God. I was asking God for our daily bread, I was asking for strength, I was giving thanks, I was asking God to help make his Kingdom of justice arrive soon.

RACHEL Maybe I'm being rash, but … here before our microphones, could you share one of your prayers with our audience?

JESUS Why not? My favorite prayer began like this Abba, yitkadash shemaj, tete maljutaj, lajman delimjar…

RACHEL Excuse my ignorance, but what language are you speaking?

JESUS Aramaic, the language we spoke in Galilee.

RACHEL Could you translate your prayer for us?

JESUS It goes like this Papa, holy be your Name, your Kingdom come, your will be done…

RACHEL I know that prayer! You're praying the "Our Father", right? But with one change I heard you say "papa".

JESUS Yes, abba, papa.

RACHEL Does that show an excess of confidence in God?

JESUS With God you can never be too confident. God knows us and loves us.

RACHEL Well, let me tell you something that prayer is the most famous prayer in the world.

JESUS You don't mean it?

RACHEL Yes, it's the best-seller of all prayers. Every day millions and millions of people pray it.

JESUS Well, that certainly is music to my ears, Rachel. If that's the case, then for sure there are no more unjust money-lenders in the world. My dream must already be a reality.

RACHEL Excuse me, Jesus Christ, but … what are you talking about?

JESUS About my prayer. If people have recited it so much, then by now all debts must have been canceled and forgotten.

RACHEL Debts? What are you referring to?

JESUS I'm referring to what I ask for in my prayer. Don't you remember, Rachel? How does it begin?

RACHEL Okay, if I make a mistake, please correct me. Let's see. "Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy Name, thy Kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Am I doing okay?

JESUS Keep going, keep going…

RACHEL "Give us this day our daily bread,…"

JESUS Go on.

RACHEL "And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us…"

JESUS No, no, no…

RACHEL What do you mean, no?

JESUS I didn't say that. I didn't talk about trespasses.

RACHEL All right, then, "sins", which is the same thing.

JESUS No! I talked about debts.

RACHEL Debts with God.

JESUS Debts with the money-lenders.

RACHEL But…

JESUS Debts of money, Rachel.

RACHEL Hold on a minute, we have a call coming in ... Yes, hello?

LIANA This is Liana Cisneros speaking. I represent the Jubilee 2000 Campaign, and I want to congratulate Jesus Christ and tell your audience that the Our Father has in fact been poorly interpreted. That prayer actually refers to material debts.

JESUS You see I was right, Rachel?

RACHEL Liana, you're saying that that famous prayer, the Our Father, has been adulterated?

LIANA Yes, just like decaffeinated coffee. They removed from it its very essence.

RACHEL And what was that essence?

LIANA Jesus Christ can explain it to you better than I can. See you later!

RACHEL Thank you, Liana Cisneros… Jesus Christ?

JESUS Listen, Rachel. In my time poor people earned very little and took out loans in order to be able to feed their families. They became indebted to the landlords and the money-lenders. Those debts were unjust, and they became eternal because the people couldn't pay them, not in a thousand years. So they ended their days humiliated and desperate.

RACHEL It happened in your time, and it's still happening today.

JESUS I talked about those debts. I begged God for that yoke to be broken. God will not forgive us if we do not first cancel our debts with the poorest people.

RACHEL Perhaps without meaning to, you are touching on a topic that is a burning issue today. Because there are rich countries which call themselves Christian, but they refuse to pardon the debts of the poor countries. And there are also international institutions which are strangling the indebted nations.

JESUS Well, I assure you that they will not be pardoned if they don't first condone those debts. This is the Word of God.

RACHEL Thanks be to God. [sounding confused] Ahem… From Tabgha, near Capernaum, this is Rachel Perez of Emisoras Latinas.

MUSIC

ANNOUNCER Another God is Possible. Exclusive interviews with Jesus Christ in his second coming to Earth. A production of María and José Ignacio López Vigil, with the support of the Syd Forum and Christian Aid.

INTERVIEW 28: BACKGROUND MATERIAL

The Aramaic language

Like all the Israelites of his time, Jesus spoke Aramaic, a Semitic language belonging to the same linguistic family as Hebrew. Aramaic has a history of more than three thousand years, and it is still a living tongue, spoken today by some 400,000 persons in Lebanon, Syria, Turkey, Israel, Armenia and Georgia. It is used in the liturgy of several eastern churches (Chaldean Catholic, Maronite Catholic, Syrian Catholic and Syrian Orthodox).

Aramaic was the common language used in Galilee and Judea starting in the fifth century before Christ, while Hebrew became a language limited to teachers of the Law and students of the sacred scriptures. The gospels preserve a few Aramaic words or expressions used by Jesus, for example, "raca" (fool), "talitha cumi" (little girl, get up), "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani (My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?). Naturally, the Aramaic spoken in Galilee had a characteristic accent, which explains why Peter was recognized as a Galilean in Jerusalem. In order to give greater realism to the masochistic film "The Passion of the Christ" (2004), Mel Gibson had his characters speak in Aramaic. However, people who currently speak Aramaic thought the language used in the film was forced and artificial.

Abba, Papa

Several times the gospels refer to Jesus' custom of praying in silence at night (Luke 5,16). Jesus also would have recited the traditional prayers of his people: in the morning, in the evening, before meals and on the Sabbath in the synagogue. What most impressed his contemporaries, though, was his very personal way of talking with God: it was a constant, confident conversation quite apart from liturgical laws and ceremonies.

In the prayer called the "Our Father" Jesus departed from the religious customs of his people and his times. The prayers used by the Israelites were recited in Hebrew, but the Our Father is a prayer in Aramaic, the language used by the common people. What is most remarkable in this prayer is that Jesus addresses God as "Abba" (papa, daddy), a cherished word in the Aramaic tongue. "Abba" and "Imma" (papa, mama) are the very first words a young child learns to utter. For Jesus' contemporaries, it would have been inconceivable and disrespectful to address God so informally. In all the extensive prayer literature of ancient Judaism, there is nowhere to be found a single example in which God is invoked as "Abba", neither in liturgical texts nor in private prayers. For that reason biblical exegetes consider this expression to be the "ipsisima vox Iesu": it is unquestionably a word that was spoken by Jesus.

Year of Grace: cancellation of debts

Jesus knew quite well of the abuses that creditors and money-lenders committed against the poor people of his country, and he was quick to denounce them. In the first sermon he gave, in the synagogue of Nazareth, he proclaimed the "Year of Grace", referring to a very ancient legal institution going back to the time of Moses. According to the scriptures, the Year of Grace was to be celebrated after every "seven weeks of years", that is, every fiftieth year, after 49 (7 X 7) years have passed (Leviticus 25,8-18).

When the prescribed year arrived, all slaves were to be set free, all debts were to be canceled, and all properties that had been acquired were to be returned to their original owners, all with the aim of

avoiding a concentration of wealth in Israel. The social function of this law was to help keep families united around a patrimony that was large enough to guarantee a dignified life. The Year of Grace was celebrated also as a memorial to the original equality that had existed in the earliest history of the people of Israel, when nothing belonged to anybody and everything belong to all.

There was another law with similar aims, namely, the law of the "Sabbatical Year", which was to be observed every seven years. Such legal provisions were designed to guarantee freedom and dignity for the people. In the synagogue of Nazareth Jesus protested that these laws were not being observed. Given the huge differences that existed between rich and poor, he proposed a new celebration of the Year of Grace as the starting-point for bringing about serious change in his country. In keeping with this, Jesus' favorite prayer makes it clear that God will not forgive our "debts" to Him is we do not first pardon the debts that others have with us.

Jubilee Year: canceling the external debt

The Year of Grace is also called the "Jubilee" Year because in ancient Israel it was announced by the sounding of a horn called a "yobel" in Hebrew. In 1996 a coalition of Christian development agencies launched a campaign called Jubilee 2000, which later spread to more than 60 countries around the world. Since the external debt of the poor nations of the South continues to be a heavy burden on their economies, we still hear the echoes of that campaign today.

This campaign demanded the cancellation of the foreign debt of the planet's poorest countries. It succeeded in collecting 24 million signatures from people of all nations. The agencies promoting this initiative explained their reasons for denouncing the external debt as unjust. The principal reasons are these: many international loans are negotiated secretly between corrupt local elites and powerful lenders like the IMF and the World Bank; the people most affected by the external debt are the poor, because the national budget allotments for health, education and drinking water are reduced in order to repay the foreign debt; there do not exist bankruptcy laws for nations, nor is there any framework for establishing when a debt simply cannot be repaid; finally, the negotiations for debt cancellation are always controlled by the creditors.

Despite later initiatives, such as the so-called HIPC, aimed at pardoning almost totally the debts of many of the world's poorest and most highly indebted countries, the problem of unmanageable foreign debts continues to be a destabilizing element for the great majority of countries.

Liana Cisneros is a Peruvian researcher, a member of "Jubilee Plus", a London-based center that specializes in the analysis of foreign debt and continues the work of the Jubilee 2000 Campaign. She participates in our program to reinforce Jesus' opinion about the cancellation of debts.

See: http://www.deudailegitima.org/downloads/jubileo1.doc.
See: http://www.jubileeresearch.org/jubilee2000/espanol/introduccion.html

Interview 29
HE CURED SICK PEOPLE?

RACHEL We're broadcasting today from Capernaum. Right behind us is what was once the house of Simon Peter, not far from the town's fishing wharf on the Sea of Galilee. And with us once again is Jesus Christ, in an exclusive interview. We give you a very warm welcome, Master.

JESUS The same to you, Rachel, and I remind you that…

RACHEL Yes, yes, I know, not to call you Master. Excuse me one more time. You know, Jesus, our radio listeners have been insisting with me to ask about the miracles you performed.

JESUS What miracles?

RACHEL If I've counted well, the gospels narrate that you worked as many as 41 miracles. Most of them involved the healing of different infirmities. My first question is this were those people suffering from incurable physical infirmities or rather from psychosomatic ailments?

JESUS What kind of ailments?

RACHEL That is, infirmities of the mind, psychological complaints. For example, in blindness that's caused by hysteria, the eyes are not damaged, but the person can't see because of a trauma that was suffered. Was this the kind of sickness you healed?

JESUS I don't know. Let me tell you what happened one day. I was talking to the people, right here in Peter's house. There were a lot of people around me, and some young fellows arrived. Since they couldn't reach me because of the crowd, they opened a hole in the roof. Imagine that.

RACHEL Well, they wanted to hear you, certainly.

JESUS No, they had with them a family member who was paralyzed. And they lowered him down from the roof on a cot and all. There was a great commotion.

RACHEL And what did you do?

JESUS I talked for a while with the sick man, and he told me the many misfortunes of his life. And the last of them was that he couldn't walk.

RACHEL And then?

JESUS Then I fixed my gaze on him for a good while. I think I could see him from within. I encouraged him and told him Get up and walk.

RACHEL And the paralytic got up?

JESUS Yes, he straightened up, he felt that his legs would sustain him… and he walked about.

RACHEL A miracle?

JESUS I don't know.

RACHEL What do you mean, you don't know?

JESUS Well, I don't know it if was a miracle. In my time I knew persons, especially women, who used to encourage and strengthen sick people with their words, with their hands. I saw them do greater things than what I did that day.

RACHEL But there were other days. They used to bring you invalids, blind people, deaf people… What did you do for them?

JESUS The same thing. I would look deep within them, I would give them confidence in their own strength. And many were cured.

RACHEL Was it what we could call today healing psychotherapy?

JESUS I really don't know what you'd call it, Rachel, but they were cured.

RACHEL Did you think they were miracles?

JESUS I thought they were signs of God's love for the poorest of the poor, for the people most despised. They were signs, symbols, do you understand?

RACHEL But you mean you didn't do any of those other wonders, the miracle-miracles?

JESUS And what would those miracle-miracles be?

RACHEL I don't know, maybe that a dead person was raised, or an armless person grew arms, or a footless person suddenly found he had feet.

JESUS But what are you saying, Rachel? For God nothing is impossible, but God doesn't do weird things like that. God doesn't change the rules in the middle of the game.

RACHEL Hold on a second…

JESUS Who are those people coming this way?

RACHEL They look to me like competitors, reporters from other stations. We'll take a commercial break and be back shortly. I'm Rachel Perez, this is Emisoras Latinas in Capernaum, Palestine.

MUSIC

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INTERVIEW 29: BACKGROUND MATERIAL

In the house of Peter

The story of the paralytic cured by Jesus in Peter's house appears in the three synoptic gospels (Mark 2,1-12). The foundation of this tiny house, in the present-day ruins of Capernaum, is one of the sites that can be most accurately and historically related to concrete events of Jesus' life.

A miracle?

It has been amply shown that there are illnesses and that there are sick people – there is a difference – and it can be proved that the illnesses of some sick people are closely related to psychological traumas or to reversible psychic processes. We also know that in every culture there have existed – and there exist today – persons who are capable of "healing" such sick people through the vital energy of their words and through the strength they communicate by their spiritual authority, their compassion and their benevolence.

Paralysis often has a psychic origin. Doctor Nicanor Arriola, an orthopedist known and loved in Iquitos, Peru, relates the following experience: *One day an old man in a wheelchair came to my office with his family. I examined the invalid's muscles and concluded that nothing was wrong with him: he was suffering from "hysterical paralysis". So, remembering what Jesus used to do, I got up and stood before the old man, and with a voice that was authoritative but also tender I said to him: Get up and walk! And the old man stood up and walked haltingly toward me. The family considered it a miracle.*

Faith moves endorphins

How can we explain this "miracle" or so many other "miracles" of this kind? *Faith moves mountains,* Jesus told us. What Jesus could not know, because nobody in his day knew it, was that *faith also moves endorphins.*

Some healers are simply charlatans who take advantage of people's ignorance and desperation. An intelligent and humorous film that gives a critical portrayal of the way these quacks operate is "Leap of Faith" (1992), from the director Richard Pearson. But in many cases it is not a matter of tricks. Rather, the cure is due to the well-known "placebo effect", such as when a sick person is given a

sugar-pill or is injected with an unmedicated serum, but is told that it is an effective remedy for the illness. As many as 50% of patients treated with placebos experience improvement.

Why does this happen? Doctor Arriola explains it thus: *Since the sick person has faith in the medicine he is taking, his body reacts positively by producing in the brain substances called endorphins, which are like a natural morphine that calms pain and makes him feel better. The discharge of endorphins into the bloodstream explains, for example, how even an individual with a broken foot can run to escape from a burning building. It also explains how a sick woman on whom a healer or a preacher lays his hands is able to recover her strength and get up from her sickbed. And it is quite possible that that woman is truly cured, because her sickness, like that of the old man whom I "cured", was more psychological than physical. With a dose of confidence in the doctor and a discharge of endorphins, some sick people get up and walk, or recover their sight, or get cured of their illness. Our body is the best pharmacy we have. Our body reacts to sicknesses and produces the curative substances we need. The miracle is one that we perform ourselves.*

Jesus, a healer

In the four gospels, some 41 miracles are attributed to Jesus. Matthew cites the most (24), and John the fewest (9). Most of these miraculous deeds described in the gospels involve the healing of different sicknesses. Even the harshest critics of miracles admit that Jesus must have been a man with a great ability for curing sick people, for alleviating their pain, and for strengthening their faith and their confidence that they could be cured. It is difficult to define precisely what "powers" Jesus had, given the fact that the healings happened two thousand years ago and are only sketchily described in the gospels. Nowadays we know that the most effective therapies are those which take an integral, holistic view of the human person and seek to discover beneath the physical symptoms the psychic or spiritual cause of the illness. Jesus of Nazareth already "knew" all about this. And "this" is what explains his "miracles".

Miracles that are signs

If the miracle stories in the gospels are subjected to rigorous literary criticism, it will be seen that some of them are duplicates (for example, compare Mark 10,46-52 with Matthew 20,29-34), others are expanded, and still others are fancifully embellished. All this indicates that, although there is a definite historical nucleus in the accounts of the healings that Jesus performed, the miracles should not be interpreted as a series of wondrous deeds performed by a powerful superman – they should rather be seen as prophetic signs of liberation.

To emphasize this perspective the gospel of John, when referring to the "miracles" of Jesus, always uses the Greek word "semeion", meaning "sign". By employing this word, John avoids the danger of turning the action of Jesus into a spectacular physical phenomenon and instead presents it as a sign or a proof that God desires life for human beings and wants them to be free. God frees us from the sickness and the sadness, from the anxiety and the dejection that are linked to illness. In Jesus' time disease caused even more desperation than it does now, since people were quite ignorant of the scientific origins of maladies and there was a generalized belief that sickness was God's punishment for sin or a test to which God submitted people to find out how they would react or to see how much they would put up with without sinning and cursing God.

Signs that speak

The perspective of John's gospel is theological: the "miracles" of Jesus were not isolated marvelous deeds that he performed when he was moved by compassion for individual cases of suffering. If that had been the case, they would not be signs of anything, and their meaning would be greatly reduced. Rather, John presents the healings as signs that reveal what is at the core of Jesus' mission.

For us today, what does it mean that Jesus of Nazareth cured a paralytic in the first century? The gospels answer this question by presenting Jesus as a messenger of God's great project: if Jesus made a prostrated man stand up again, it was a sign that his message was capable of making all human beings get up and walk, of shaking them out of their passivity, their fears, their fatalism. Each of the healings that Jesus performed was recounted by the evangelists as a way of portraying the rehabilitation of men and women who have been victims of different existential challenges.

Those specific illnesses

In various gospel accounts, Jesus cured blind people. In those days the extremely dry climate of Palestine and the general lack of hygiene made eye disease quite common: ocular infection, glaucoma, and also hysterical blindness. Were these the illnesses that Jesus cured? Perhaps they were, perhaps they weren't. What we do know is that he opened the eyes of the people so that they understood that neither their illness nor their misery was something desired by God.

There are also accounts of healings of the paralyzed and the disabled, of the lame and those with "withered hands" Most likely these were people suffering a variety of diseases of the bones or the muscles, people who were sick of arthrosis or arthritis. Without orthopedic assistance, such illnesses were truly a torture for the infirm. Did Jesus cure them? Maybe he did, maybe he didn't. What we do know is that he gave new vigor to people who felt defeated, useless, worthless.

The gospels also relate several healings of lepers. In those days people were generally ignorant of the causes of skin disease, so that any ailments of the skin – eruptions, pockmarks, herpes, pimples, scabies – were called "leprosy". And because of religious beliefs, people who suffered such diseases were considered especially cursed. They were "impure", and their impurity ostracized completely from society. Today we have knowledge of the importance of nervous states in causing skin disease. Did Jesus cure lepers? Maybe he did, maybe he didn't. What we do know is that he drew close to them in order to integrate them back into the community from which the religious laws of the time had banished them.

There are also gospel accounts of the curing of deaf and mute people, and of "crazy" people. Because of their enigmatic or shocking symptoms, people tended to believe that such sicknesses were caused by "impure" spirits that were present in the body of the sick persons, which meant they were possessed by demons. Did Jesus cure them? Maybe he did, maybe he didn't. What we do know is that he opened the eyes of his people to make them lose their fear of the devil and regain their confidence in God.

The three accounts of “raising the dead” (the son of the widow of Nain, the daughter of the Roman centurion, and Lazarus of Bethany) are completely symbolic narratives.

The rules of the game

While a sick person’s upbeat, lively attitude and a healer’s spiritual authority and positive energy can help cure certain ailments and “reverse” the advance of serious illnesses –this has been observed, for example, in cases of cancer – we should be skeptical about the how long such cures will last. Since they are illnesses with a psychic origin, what disappears in the “healing” is often only the symptoms, while the physical causes of the illness remain. The human potential for curing or being cured, as well as for making sick or getting sick, is truly prodigious.

There are also “impossible” miracles which nobody, as spiritual as he or she may be, can perform, and which no prayer can bring about. For example, illnesses which are due to genetic defects are not curable. An amputated limb can never grow back. And a dead person cannot come back to life. Nobody can change the rules of the game of life, which are the same as the rules of the game of the limitations which culminate in our death. Not even God.

Interview 30
THE MIRACLE OF JONAH?

RACHEL Friends of Emisoras Latinas, we continue with our mobile unit in Capernaum, interviewing no one less that Jesus Christ himself during his second coming to earth. At this moment we are arriving at… at… Those people coming this way are correspondents from other networks.

JESUS Could it be that they heard you talking about miracles and now are all coming here?

RACHEL Wherever there are spectacular events and scenes, they're sure to appear. Please, no pushing, please…

JOURNALIST Are you really Jesus Christ, or do you just look like him?

CORRESPONDENT Do you support or oppose the World Trade Organization?

WOMAN REPORTER Will China become the new empire of the 21st century?

RACHEL Please keep order, colleagues. We're going to hold a press conference. Please don't push. Just take your place there, wherever you can…

JOURNALIST If you are really Jesus Christ returning to earth, perform a miracle to prove it to us.

SEVERAL That's it, a miracle! We want a miracle!

CORRESPONDENT Get the camera ready, Shorty, things are going to get really good now! Come on, this guy's gonna do a miracle!

JESUS Listen,… Once I was here in this very same place, in Capernaum, and people were asking me to do healings and miracles…

WOMAN REPORTER And how many did you do?

JESUS Not one.

WOMAN REPORTER What do you mean, not one? If there are no miracles, we'll lose audience ratings.

JESUS I said it then, and I'll say it to you now this generation won't see any miracle except the miracle of Jonah.

WOMAN REPORTER Hey, that would be great! What if a whale would swallow you and vomit you back up! Can you do that one again?

JESUS No, my friend. The whale didn't swallow anybody. The miracle of Jonah was that God sent the prophet to preach in Nineveh. And the inhabitants of that city were transformed.

WOMAN REPORTER What were they transformed into? Whales?

JESUS Listen, open your ears. The Ninevites were haughty people; they were greedy and violent. But they believed what Jonah said to them, they repented, and they changed their lives.

JOURNALIST But what kind of miracle is that? There's nothing spectacular about that!

JESUS It's the miracle of people being converted, of people changing their lives.

CORRESPONDENT Leave off the spiel for a while, and do a real miracle, the kind you know how to do.

JESUS Listen to me, friends. Jonah and all the prophets have said it time and again the important thing is to share, to help your neighbor. Whoever has a plate of food should give half of it to a neighbor who has none. Whoever raises his hand to strike another should extend it to cure people's wounds. The only miracle is sharing what one has, not doing harm, doing good. All the rest is a matter of tricks.

WOMAN REPORTER Just one miracle, even if it's a little one! What don't you turn this soft drink into wine?

CORRESPONDENT Or why don't you go surfing on the lake without a surfboard?

WOMAN REPORTER Fly! Fly up in the sky, and then come down again!

JESUS Rachel, this is like casting pearls before swine…. Let's get out of here!

RACHEL Yes, the truth is that these colleagues of mine…

JOURNALIST Hey, hey, where are you going? We haven't finished yet. We haven't seen anything.

CORRESPONDENT This guy ain't Jesus Christ. He's an impostor!

WOMAN REPORTER Put away the cameras. This footage is useless.

JESUS Come on, Rachel! Shake the dust off your sandals!

RACHEL Yes, we'd better go. Come on. After this disastrous press conference, and from Capernaum, this is Rachel Perez, reporting for Emisoras Latinas.

MUSIC

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INTERVIEW 30: BACKGROUND MATERIAL

Jonah and the whale

The book of Jonah is one of the most popular and well-known texts of the Old Testament. Because of its humor and dramatic tension this story has provided abundant material for radio dramas, cartoons and movies.

The story tells how Jonah was sent to Nineveh, an important city of Assyria; it was on the Tigris River, near present-day Mosul in Iraq. Jonah was not a historical character, although he is classified as one of the "minor prophets". Probably written in the eighth century before Christ, the book of Jonah has as its central message a call to universalism and a critique of the excessive nationalism of the Jewish people. Jesus recalls this story for the reporters so that they will understand that he was never a magician and that the core of his activity involved denouncing injustices and announcing the justice of a kingdom where the only miracle is sharing what one has.

Jefferson's Bible

Thomas Jefferson, principal author of the American Declaration of Independence and third president of the U.S.A., had high esteem for the message of Jesus and rejected the popular image of Jesus as a magician who worked miracles and performed extraordinary feats. He therefore eliminated from the gospels all the narratives that contained supernatural elements and composed what is known as "Jefferson's Bible" or "The Life and Morals of Jesus of Nazareth". In this text there are no longer any angels, prophecies, miracles, or resurrection from the dead. Jefferson cut out all such stories, since he was convinced that the most important thing about Jesus was his message and not his miracles, which could be interpreted as acts of magic. He finished his "Bible" around 1820, but he never published it for fear of criticism. The most complete version of this work was finally published in 1895 by the National Museum of Washington and is available on the internet.

Sensationalism and yellow journalism

The reporters who are seeking out Jesus and Rachel are a caricature of the sensationalist reporters who abound today in the mass media, both printed and electronic. They refuse to analyze and evaluate the causes and consequences of the spectacular news items they transmit. The term "yellow press" refers to any sensationalist reporting that indulges in terrifying headlines, stories of catastrophes, and highly detailed descriptions of crimes, accidents, and scandals, especially when they concern well-known persons in politics or show business.

Calling such news "yellow" goes back to an old battle (around 1895) that took place between two major U.S. newspapers, Joseph Pulitzer's *New York World* and William Randolph Hearst's *New York*

Journal. Both newspapers were accused of exaggerating this lurid type of reporting in order to claim exclusive scoops and increase sales. The newspaper *The New York Press* denounced the reporting style of both Hearst and Pulitzer in an article titled “We called them yellow because they are yellow,” the insinuation being, of course, that they were cowards.

The miracle of Jonah

In the biblical narrative of Jonah, the “extraordinary” event is not Jonah’s survival in the belly of a whale. The real “miracle” was that the Ninevites, who were thought to be “hard-hearted” pagans and foreigners, accepted the word of the Jewish prophet Jonah and changed their lives as a result. The Ninevites were “converted”, they were transformed. For this reason Jesus refers to the story of Jonas in his discussion with the reporters: the greatest miracle happens when people change their lives, when they transform their attitudes about life.

Interview 31
DOES GOD WORK MIRACLES?

RACHEL [to studio] Yes, I hear you fine… Hello… Yes, the other reporters have gone now. Put me on the air. [announcing] Friends of Emisoras Latinas, we continue here in Capernaum. At our side is Jesus Christ, who we hope will clear up a lot of things for us. Pardon me for insisting so much, Jesus, but we should take up again the question of miracles.

JESUS Well, let's do that, Rachel.

RACHEL In our recent, disrupted press conference you were saying that the real miracle is sharing sharing food and the possessions we have, and changing our lives. But the people are looking for more sensational things. Sick people make pilgrimages to Lourdes, to Fatima and to other sanctuaries, hoping for their illnesses to be cured. And who can even count all those evangelical crusades that take place, where people ask for miracles and healings?

JESUS Just like in my own time, Rachel. People used to go to the pool of Bethesda and to the Temple of Jerusalem, and they used to pray and ask God to cure them.

RACHEL And?

JESUS And nothing.

RACHEL Our audience must be wondering if God is good, how hard would it be for him to cure a little old lady who prays to him and lights votive candles and asks to be healed?

JESUS You've already said it. God is good, and being good, he would have to cure that little old lady and *all* the little old people who pray to him. Don't you think God would be very unjust if he cured just one of them and left ninety-nine uncured?

RACHEL Maybe that woman deserves it especially, because she prayed more than the others, because she had more faith.

JESUS No, Rachel, faith is not a coin for buying miracles – "Lord, I give you so much faith in exchange for a couple of miracles."

RACHEL Well, then, let him cure all of them…

JESUS And since nobody wants to get sick, just as nobody wants to die, then God would have to become a doctor, do away with death, and go about curing everybody all the time.

RACHEL But there could be some exceptions, I don't know, some special treatment for certain persons….

JESUS God doesn't play favorites. I remember when that tower collapsed in Siloe and killed 18 Galileans. The ones who escaped being crushed said, "Thanks be to God that we were saved." … But what about those who died? Were they worse sinners than the ones who survived? Did they not also deserve to live? No, Rachel, God doesn't play favorites.

RACHEL Then, why did those 18 Galileans die?

JESUS Because the tower fell on top of them. Because the builders did a bad job in constructing the tower. Or maybe because a terrible wind blew it down.

RACHEL But whatever happened, whether natural disaster or human error, God could have stopped that tower from collapsing.

JESUS If God went about correcting all the sloppy work done by builders in the world, if God constantly devoted himself to changing the direction of the winds and preventing all the evils that befall us, as well as all the things we do wrong, then God would have to be a doctor and a master builder, he would have to take care of all the rains and all the harvests, he would have to be a judge to resolve all our lawsuits, … And what would happen? We'd end up not being real men and women; we'd be simply clay figures in God's hands, puppets without souls, without freedom.

RACHEL In sum, you're telling us that God doesn't act in these cases, he doesn't cure anybody, because he'd have to cure everybody? Is that it?

JESUS That's it.

RACHEL Well, there's a doubt that still plagues me, and surely many of our listeners as well. If that's the case, then what's the use of praying and asking God for health, for work, for …?

JESUS Can I ask you for something? Here in Capernaum they used to sell some really delicious fried fish. I want to see how they make them now. Will you go with me? Can I treat you? And we can continue our conversation.

RACHEL Sure, but you'll be my guest. That way I can perform the miracle of sharing. [announcing voice] Rachel Perez in Capernaum, reporting to you through Emisoras Latinas and through the Internet at out web page www.emisoraslatinas.net.

MUSIC

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INTERVIEW 31: BACKGROUND MATERIAL

A CASINO MANAGER

For people with a sensitive conscience, the problem of evil in the world has always been the greatest obstacle to believing in God. The difficulty arises from a certain image that people have of God: if God is the creator of everything, if he is all-powerful and infinitely good, then why does he allow suffering, catastrophes, evil, and death to exist? Couldn't he prevent all these things from happening? Couldn't he act to ward off evils? Couldn't he work miracles to free us from so much pain?

Sometimes metaphors and comparison can help us, not so much to find answers, but to give our questions a different orientation. The German theologian Eugen Drewermann does just that in the following reflection:

God cannot be conceived as if he were a man planning a train schedule. If you'll allow me an image, I would suggest that of a casino manager who is not interested in having all the gamblers win, but who is intensely curious to know what is going to happen. I imagine God as one who is trying to move the world forward just as it is. If God exists, he has given up on knowing what the final destiny of this world will be. For the natural sciences, which are guided by the relation between chance and necessity, this is an appropriate image, one that allows us to understand why our earth is home to so many marvels and at the same time to so much suffering. The two things are intrinsically related. And that's what we have to accept. And to the very end. We human beings have to learn to accept a world that is open and undetermined, because it is just such a world that allows us to be tremendously responsible for our acts.

Badly built towers

In Luke's gospel (13,4) Jesus refers to a tower near Jerusalem which collapsed, killing 18 Galileans. A great many disasters would be avoided if those who "build towers" were responsible in their work and if all workers and professionals really performed well the jobs they are supposed to do. There is much avoidable suffering in the world. There is much suffering that we cause for ourselves and for others. Quite sensible and useful, then, is that prayer which has become very popular in various versions and in different settings: *Lord, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.*

Interview 32
WHAT'S THE USE OF PRAYER?

RACHEL After savoring some very delicious fish from the Sea of Galilee, we are back with Jesus Christ, who hasn't visited these places for some two thousand years. There are several topics we want to continue discussing with him. Are you ready, Jesus?

JESUS Ready. After a good meal, you can think a lot better.

RACHEL Can we return to the matter of miracles and prayers asking for miracles?

JESUS Sure thing, Rachel.

RACHEL Tell us, Jesus Christ, if God doesn't work miracles, as you were explaining to us earlier, then what's the use of praying and of asking God for health or for a job or to do well in an exam? Is prayer any use at all?

JESUS Rachel, prayer is something useless and also very useful. I remember one day here in Capernaum. Peter's mother-in-law got very sick. There was no way to make her feel better, and so they were praying for her. Well, I went over to her bed and took her hand; I talked with her, told her some jokes, made her laugh, … and she got better. So much so that she got out of bed and even made us all supper. In fact, she prepared some fried fish like the ones we just ate.

RACHEL But … was she healed?

JESUS She was better for a few days. She was already quite old. She died soon. He time had come.

RACHEL But if her family was praying and you didn't do any miracle to make her better, then why are you telling us this story?

JESUS So that you'll understand that the purpose of prayer is not to ask for miracles, but to ask for strength. God doesn't change the laws of nature to work miracles. He's not going to change those laws for you, because of your prayers. God is just, and he'd have to change the laws for all his sons and daughters, even if they didn't pray.

RACHEL And if I don't get the miracle, why do I pray for strength?

JESUS So that you can hold your head high and stop being gloomy. So that you open up your heart and understand that life goes on. All that will invigorate you, and maybe even cure you.

RACHEL And if I'm not cured?

JESUS If you're not cured, you won't feel alone. You'll know that God is with you, that he gives you his hand in bad times. That afternoon, with Peter's mother-in-law I was God's hand for her. I gave her the strength to get up. And afterwards, when she died, I also held her hand to the end. That's what prayer is good for to make you feel accompanied, no matter what happens.

RACHEL Many people look for energy in charms, stones, holy cards, candles, relics, scapulars … What do you think of all that?

JESUS If it helps them… I've seen little kids who can get to sleep only when they're holding onto a doll.

RACHEL And so, we shouldn't ask God for anything? You used to ask for your daily bread.

JESUS I asked him for it, and I went out to look for it. Because praying is not enough. My mother always taught me that saying, "God helps those who help themselves." And my father kept telling us, "Pray to God, but keep wielding the hammer."

RACHEL One last question. They say that you used to pray in the mountains. Was that some mysterious invocation?

JESUS No, Rachel, there was no mystery there. Didn't I already tell you, I was talking with God? Don't you talk with your father and your mother about what's going on in your life? Don't you talk with your friends? If you're sad and you tell somebody about it, then your sadness is divided in half. If you're happy and you tell somebody about it, then your happiness is multiplied. Prayer also works that way.

RACHEL And you, friends in our listening audience, what do you think of all this? What's your favorite charm? Or your favorite prayer? Remember to call us or visit our Web page. We're always eager to hear your opinions and your questions. And so is Jesus Christ, but he won't work any miracles for you! From Capernaum, this is Rachel Perez, Emisoras Latinas.

MUSIC

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INTERVIEW 32: BACKGROUND MATERIAL

How Jesus prayed

Several times the gospels refer to Jesus' custom of praying in isolated places in the silence of the night (e.g., Luke 5,16). His talking with God in this way, apart from the familiar rituals, must have

impressed his contemporaries, and they must also have been surprised by the way he prayed for other people (Luke 22,31-32, John 14,15-16). In Israel it was not common practice for people to pray for others. Interceding for others was the role of the prophet, of the person who felt responsible for his people and concerned about their situation.

Moreover, in the prayers of the common people of Israel, God was seen as a distant monarch, and praying was a form of rendering homage to him. People therefore tended to pray with fixed solemn formulas that had been established by ancient traditions. For this reason the prayer that Jesus taught his followers, the Our Father, must have amazed them: in that prayer Jesus calls God "Abba" (papa, dad). In this way Jesus removed prayer from a sacred liturgical setting, where Jewish tradition had always placed it, and located it right at the center of daily life. Addressing God with such confidence and spontaneity must have seemed highly unusual to Jesus' companions. In teaching the Our Father he was not so much providing a fixed formula to be repeated in prayer – he was proposing a complete new relationship with God, one of great confidence.

An interior attitude

Prayers do not bring results because God, Jesus, Mary or the angels and saints in heaven hear them, react benevolently, and decide to use their power to help the person praying. This is an archaic view of prayer which is found in all the world's religions, but it is not the Christian vision – it is not what Jesus taught. Prayers can bring about results – consolation, encouragement, peace of mind, even the healing of some infirmity – not because they "convince" God that he should act, but because of the interior attitude they create in the person who prays: he recognizes his vulnerability; he humbly accepts his limitations, his fragility, his fears; he confesses his errors; he opens himself to forgiving others and changing his life; he decides to live life to the full, etc.

Medals and scapulars

Wearing crosses, medals or scapulars around one's neck as an expression of religious sentiment is a deeply rooted tradition. The most popular scapular is that of the Virgin of Carmel, which according to tradition was given by the Virgin Mary to Simon Stock in London in 1251, with the promise that anyone dying while wearing this piece of cloth would not end up in hell.

One of the countless web pages on these kinds of devotions gives evidence of its superstitious character. It states that wearing medals or scapulars, or even a cross, around one's neck provides "security" in two ways: one is prevented from "going to bad places", and one is assured of divine protection, since these objects are visible signs that show the deity that "we are his fans."

The somewhat arrogant nature of this "Christian" devotion is seen also when it is explained that people who wear "Santeria" necklaces, signs of the zodiac or other types of charms are actually honoring Satan and are committing a sin.

Pray to God …

Folk wisdom has traditionally produced maxims and refrains that express the need for us to "do our part" and not simply pray, expecting everything from God. A popular phrase to this effect in Spanish

is *Pray to God, but keep wielding the hammer.* In English we have the more militaristic dictum: *Keep praying, and pass the ammunition.* The musical group Guaraguao sings: *Praying is not enough; many things are needed to achieve true peace.* And Ignatius Loyola used to say: *Work as if everything depended on you, and trust as if everything depended on God.* Finally, the theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer urged people to become personally and permanently responsible for the world they live in, as he expressed in his daring statement, *To be a Christian is to live as if God did not exist.*

Interview 33
GOD'S BLESSING?

RACHEL Today we have our mobile unit installed alongside the old synagogue of Capernaum, and as in previous days we are fortunate to have as our guest Jesus Christ, and…

YOUTH Excuse me, could I interrupt?

RACHEL At Emisoras Latinas nobody interrupts, everybody participates! That's our motto!

YOUTH Are you…, are you the reporter from Emisoras Latinas?

RACHEL The very same, and who are you?

YOUTH I'm a loyal listener of your program, and besides that…

RACHEL Yes?

YOUTH I belong to the Apostolic Church "Jesus Christ is Coming".

RACHEL Really? Well, now you have the opportunity to speak with Jesus Christ himself, since he's already come.

YOUTH The thing is, like you, I'm doing some reporting about him… But where is he?

JESUS Here I am, friend. Don't you see me?

YOUTH You're…. you're Jesus Christ? The one who's been talking on the radio these days?

JESUS My name is Jesus. That business about Christ they added on afterwards.

YOUTH The truth is, I was imagining you with a different appearance.

JESUS With a crown on my head? With light rays coming out of my hands? Something like that?

YOUTH Well, no …, yes… I'm not sure, but hallelujah, glory to God! I'm not a reporter, Master, but I want to ask you a question, something personal.

RACHEL Is it okay if we broadcast it?

YOUTH Sure, if you wish.

JESUS What do you want to ask, friend?

YOUTH The pastor of my church is always repeating and repeating and repeating that God blesses those who do good works. Is that really true?

JESUS First of all, tell me what being “blessed by God” means for you.

YOUTH Being blessed means being prosperous. It means being well-off, having success in your business. Or you might even win the lottery, so that you stop suffering for the rest of your life.

JESUS Well, then, God never blessed me, … because I didn’t even have a place to lay down my head.

RACHEL Young man, if our audience is understanding you well, what you want to know is whether material wealth is proof of spiritual blessing. The richer somebody is, the more blessed by God he is. Is that it?

YOUTH Exactly. What do you say about that, Jesus Christ?

JESUS That’s the same way they thought in my own time. That was the way Job thought, a very honest man. Once I heard the story of Job read in a synagogue. That man had children, flocks, wealth, everything – he was quite rich. And from one day to the next he lost everything. Job couldn’t understand why God was punishing him since he had always acted uprightly.

YOUTH That’s the same thing I’m asking. Look, I’m faithful to my family and my work; I don’t cause harm to anybody; I even started a business. But I’ve been a failure. Things have gone badly for me all around. Why doesn’t God bless me?

JESUS Tell, what’s your name?

YOUTH Mortimer.

JESUS Mortimer?

YOUTH Yeah, they even gave me an ugly name. My life is a mess.

JESUS Don’t say that, friend. And don’t believe what they tell you. If wealth and success were proof of divine blessing, then my mother Mary, my father Joseph and I myself would all be cursed by God, because we never had two pennies to rub together!

YOUTH So?

JESUS So God’s blessing is not some kind of wealth that’s possessed. It is love which is given; it’s loving others, struggling to help others. Believe me, Mortimer, the person who gives is happier than the one who receives.

YOUTH And what about me?

JESUS God is blessing you already. Have no doubt that God is also inviting you to his banquet.

YOUTH Jesus Christ, I'm really happy I met you. How can I thank you? Would you like to come to my house, and you too, miss? I can only offer you a little bread and tea….

JESUS Bread and tea, that's almost a banquet! Sure, we'll go to your house, Mortimer! And afterwards we can answer more of your questions, Rachel.

RACHEL Well, yes, but… but first let me sign off from the program. From Capernaum and for Emisoras Latinas, reporting for you today, this is Rachel Perez,… and Mortimer.

MUSIC

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INTERVIEW 33: BACKGROUND MATERIAL

The theology of prosperity

The theology of prosperity, which has become very fashionable among some evangelical churches, such as the neo-Pentecostals and the neo-Charismatics, teaches that economic prosperity and success in business are external evidence of God's blessing. Such teaching has been common among the tele-evangelists who have proliferated in the U.S.A. since the 1960s, and it was transplanted to Latin America in the 1980s. In his book *God's Bankers* (Ediciones Puma, Lima, 2002), the Baptist pastor Martín Ocaña points out that this theology is a spirited defense of the prosperity of U.S. society and even makes such prosperity a criterion for determining whether a society is truly Christian or not. By means of an extensive bibliography and abundant quotations from preachers of prosperity theology, the book explains the neo-Pentecostal hermeneutic and certain concepts that are very present in that theology, such as "revival", "missions", and "well-being".

Reading the Bible out of context, the theologians of prosperity propose ideas such as these: the sin of Adam was causing humanity to lose its productivity; Joseph of Nazareth was a lumber entrepreneur; Jesus surrounded himself with rich people and had so much money at his disposal that he needed a treasurer; the disciples of Jesus were fishing entrepreneurs; it is never God's will that a Christian be poor, etc. At the same time these groups have convinced their faithful of the truth of the slogan, "The more you give, the more you will receive": they will be blessed in the measure that they give tithes to the pastors and offer alms to the churches.

There is profound concern among the historical Protestant churches because of the neo-Pentecostal avalanche, which always comes accompanied by the theology of prosperity. As a simple antidote to this superficial theology, the U.S. Baptist pastor Calvin George offers the following reflections in an internet essay: *There are many things that money cannot buy. Money will buy a bed, but not sleep;*

books, but not wisdom; food, but not appetite; cosmetics, but not beauty; attention, but not love; a house, but not a home; a watch, but not time; medicine, but not health; luxury, but not culture; admiration, but not respect; an insurance policy, but not peace of mind; entertainment, but not happiness; a crucifix, but not a Savior.

Stop Suffering

The theology of prosperity has been promoted widely in Latin America by the neo-Pentecostal evangelical churches. It has been championed vigorously and with enormous financial resources by the Universal Church of God's Kingdom (UCGK), an organization founded in Brazil in 1977 by Edir Macedo Bezerra. After filling that country with gigantic temples, the UCGK has spread to all the countries of Latin America and to many on other continents as well. An interesting practice of this organization is its purchase of old movie theaters and then transforming them into temples. In some countries the church uses other names such as: "Strong Prayer to the Holy Spirit", "Christian Community of the Holy Spirit", or "Universal Ark". The UCGK also includes several associations aimed at specialized audiences. Among these are "Athletes of Christ", which appeals to athletes, and the "Sara Nossa Terra Church" and the "Full Gospel Association", which recruit their faithful among the political and economic elites. The UCGK sometimes also goes by the name of its radio and television programs, "Stop Suffering".

The UCGK declares itself to be Christian, evangelical and Pentecostal, but it is disparaged by practically all the other evangelical and Pentecostal organizations. Some of the essential elements in its "credo" are tithing, fighting against demons, belief in miracles, and the use of "sacred" objects to enter into contact with the divine. In its temples and through its radio and television programs the church sells all times of "holy objects", such as stones from the tomb of Jesus, the miraculous rose of Jericho, holy water from the River Jordan, salt blessed by the Holy Spirit, oil from Israel, etc. Extensive research done in several countries and simple examination of this group's messages lead readily to the conclusion that the whole organization is a fabulous, fraudulent business which captures those who are unwary, needy and desperate, people whose economic and emotional crises make them prone to illusory expectations and irrational fanaticism.

The story of Job

Some 500 years before Jesus, an anonymous author wrote one of the most provocative books of the Bible, the Book of Job, which tells the story of a good man who suffered all kinds of calamities. The pages of this book record Job's questioning of his misfortunes, which he considers absurd, unjust and undeserved. In the course of his crisis Job debates with several friends, who suggest to him pious considerations and urge him to resign himself. Job refuses to do so and confronts God himself, who he claims is ultimately responsible for the evils that have befallen him.

The character of Job, rebellious in the face of suffering and demanding justice of God, indicated a true revolution in the religious thinking of Israel. Before Job's time it was believed that the rewards and the punishments that came from God were visited on the whole people, as a collectivity. In Job's time, however, Judaism was no longer only a communal religion, but also a personal religion. And since there were no clear ideas about what would happen after death, people believed – and hoped – that every person would receive, while still alive on earth, a fitting reward or punishment, according to

his deserts. For the good person all would go well (he would be happy and would prosper), but the bad person would sooner or later suffer failure and distress.

The Book of Job attempts to contradict such ideas in radical fashion. Its basic theme is summed up in some very unsettling questions: Why do the good suffer? What sense is there in the pain of innocent people? Why do the unjust succeed and prosper? And going further still: How can we explain the evil that exists in the world? Why is there so much evil in the world? In the course of the 38 chapters of the book, Job poses these same questions over and over again, in every possible way. As a result of the book of Job, the thinking of the people of Israel concerning suffering and individual responsibility underwent considerable change.

Jesus did not prosper

The theology of prosperity is called radically into question by the whole life of Jesus himself and by the “economic and political” failure of his project. The gospel story of Jesus’ life and death provides no evidence that God is in any way linked to success or to power. Rather, the God of Jesus appears linked to practicing love and to making justice a reality, even though things often do not turn out as we wish since there are such huge obstacles to realizing God’s project. All that traditional imagery, which portrays God as all-powerful and supremely triumphant, changes radically in the person of Jesus, a fragile human being who fails in his mission and is killed by his enemies. That old imagery, which emphasizes achievement and success and which identifies leadership with power and pomp, creeps back into Christianity in many of the teachings about the risen Christ, who becomes once again the king of the universe and the all-powerful judge seated upon a throne of glory.

Interview 34
INFANT BAPTISM?

RACHEL Our mobile unit has moved now to the south of the country, to Judea, and we find ourselves on the very banks of the Jordan River, where two thousand years ago John baptized the crowds that came to him. Can you hear the river? … Beside us is Jesus Christ, our special guest. Jesus, I'm sure you remember that very special day when you were baptized by John. It was right here, wasn't it?

JESUS Yes, I think so. It's just that there were so many people… I can still see John, dressed in a camel skin, waist-deep in the water. John the Baptist, what a great prophet he was!

RACHEL In your time the people got baptized as adults, but nowadays they baptize kids as soon as possible, when they are still infants.

JESUS You mean, you baptize children?

RACHEL Yes, of course. It's the custom.

JESUS But what for? A little boy or a little girl, how are they going to be converted to a new way of life if they've hardly experienced anything in life?

RACHEL I don't understand why you're saying that.

JESUS Baptism is for learning how to share. That what John used to shout whoever has two tunics, let him give one to somebody who has none! That's what baptism is for for changing your life.

RACHEL Well, your followers say something different. They say that baptism is for wiping away original sin.

JESUS Original sin?

RACHEL Yes, the sin that Adam and Eve committed in the Garden of Eden. God forbade them to eat of the tree of good and evil, but the serpent tempted them and … they ate the apple.

JESUS I already know that story, but what does it have to do with baptism?

RACHEL That's what we're asking you, who should know better than anybody, because you came to this world to cleanse us from that sin.

JESUS I came to cleanse what?

RACHEL Original sin. Don't you know that that sin is inherited, that it passes from fathers to sons to grandsons to great-grandsons? That's what they taught us. We are all born with that stain, and that's why we have to get baptized, to wipe it away. And the sooner the better.

JESUS Please explain to me why.

RACHEL Because children can't enter heaven soiled with the stain of Adam and Eve.

JESUS It's amazing how life goes in circles! Listen, Rachel, in my time too the priests used to say that people got sick because of the sins that were committed in their family. Once they brought me a man born blind, and they asked me, "Who sinned, this man or his parents?"

RACHEL And what did you answer them?

JESUS I said neither he nor his parents. Because sickness does not come from sin. In those days they saw sin in sick people, and nowadays you see sin in little children. What a horrible mistake.

RACHEL Now it's my turn to ask why.

JESUS Because no sin is inherited. None. If the parents ate sour grapes, the children shouldn't have their teeth set on edge.

RACHEL But we can't help asking you if the children, as you say, are not born with sin, then what's the sense of baptizing them?

JESUS I really don't know, but what I can tell you for sure is that, with water or without it, the children will be the first to enter into God's Kingdom.

RACHEL And the adults?

JESUS Those who are ready to change their lives and to struggle for justice – let them be baptized. They will receive the Spirit of God, as I received it here from the hands of the prophet John.

RACHEL On the banks of the River Jordan, which two thousand years ago witnessed the baptism of John and which today witnesses these controversial declarations, we bring our program to an end today. I am Rachel Perez, special correspondent of Emisoras Latinas.

MUSIC

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INTERVIEW 34: BACKGROUND MATERIAL

The Jordan River

The Jordan is practically the only river that runs through the lands of Israel. It has its source in the north, near Mount Hermon, and empties into the salty waters of the Dead Sea, the lowest place on the planet, nearly 400 meters below sea level. The Jordan valley is a prolongation of the Rift Valley, which was formed 10 million years ago when the African continent was fractured in a geological event that was decisive for the human species.

The baptism of John

The use of water for purifying rituals is an element present in practically all religions and spiritual movements around the world. The rite of baptism which John popularized and which Jesus received signified that a person publicly declared himself ready to prepare the way of the Messiah. It meant undergoing "conversion" and deciding to change one's life. Jesus' baptism was the starting point for his "public life", the moment when he felt a strong urge to dedicate his life to changing the situation of his country, to sharing his ideas of God with others, and to changing the idea of God that prevailed among the people of his time, an idea that prevented them from freeing themselves and living full lives.

John's rite was collective and symbolic. After people confessed their faults, John submerged them in the waters of the river as a sign of cleansing and rebirth: water purifies, and from water life is born. The Essenes also practiced purifying ablutions, as is shown by the ritual pools found in the ruins of the Essene monastery at Qumran. Most likely John was linked with this religious group.

Being baptized is being submerged

The first Christians who lived in Palestine were baptized by being submerged in the waters of the Jordan River, thus repeating the rite of John. The early Christians in other regions performed their baptisms in rivers or pools. The very word "baptism" comes from the Greek word for "being submerged", "sinking into water". In the course of the centuries this custom was gradually lost, so that today the Catholic rite of baptism uses only a few drops of water, which the priest pours on the head of the new Christian. Christians of the orthodox rites and the evangelical churches continue to practice baptism by immersion in rivers, and even in the sea.

Because babies are born in sin…

The custom of baptizing by immersion receded as it became more common to baptize young children. This practice is found already in some second-century writings, and it gained ground as Christian theology became more and more captivated by the idea that all people are born in sin. Such a belief very quickly led to the dogma of "original sin".

Theologians found a basis for this idea in a literal interpretation of what Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 15,21 and in Romans 5,12. The idea was systematized and elaborated in the fourth century by the bishop of Hippo, the great Saint Augustine, who was the most influential theologian between Paul and Luther. He can be considered the "father" of the doctrine of original sin and consequently as the father of the tradition which degrades human sexuality, since this is viewed as the means for "transmitting" this sin. This unholy doctrine is still a key element in official Catholic theology.

Until now this doctrine of "original sin" has been the principal reason for baptizing young babies. For some people it has become almost an obsession: there have been campaigns to baptize babies immediately after they are born, and there are even campaigns to baptize aborted fetuses. Such an obsession is based on fear, namely, the belief that because of "original sin" the souls of these infants, even of those quite undeveloped, would end up in limbo, a "place" where they would not see God and would never again see their parents. After centuries of promoting this absurd belief, Vatican theologians in May 2007 officially declared that limbo "was closed". Will a consequence of this declaration be the disappearance of the custom of baptizing babies?

Baptism of children: a controversial topic

In the 4th and 5th centuries the meaning of infant baptism was debated by the Pelagians, who were considered heretics by the official church for denying the dogma of original sin. The Pelagians held that children were to be baptized not to have any sin forgiven, but to improve their state and make them adoptive children of God. The official church pursued them cruelly, insisting that even a newborn child is under the power of evil.

The Council of Florence (1442), in its decree against another heretical group called the Jacobites, reaffirmed this doctrine, declaring that baptism should not be postponed, not even for 40 or 80 days, as was the custom for some people. The reason the Council gave was *the danger of imminent death, because there is no other remedy available to these infants except the sacrament of baptism, which frees them from the powers of the devil and makes them adopted children of God.* Such a belief about innocent babies in the hands of the devil is still expressed in the Catholic baptismal rite, which includes exorcisms expressing the rejection of "Satan, his pomps and his works", a rejection that the godparents must avow in the baby's name.

Starting with the Protestant Reformation in the 16th century, Christians began to hold positions that were opposed to infant baptism, even though Luther himself maintained it. The Anabaptists, for example, were in conflict with the Lutherans for refusing to baptize children – a conflict that even provoked wars. The only Protestant denominations that continue to baptize children nowadays are the Lutherans and the Moravians. Infant baptism is also practiced in churches such as the Anglican, the Coptic, the Maronite, as well as in the Orthodox churches of Eastern Europe and the Middle East.

The blind man, sour grapes and teeth set on edge

In Jesus' time people believed that all misfortunes and all infirmities were the consequences of the sins people committed that God punished people in precise proportion to the gravity of the faults. They based such beliefs on the sacred scriptures, for example the book of Exodus, where God warns that he will punish the faults of the fathers for three generations in the future (20,5). And though the

prophet Jeremiah and the prophet Ezekiel later questioned this idea and stressed individual responsibility, many of Jesus' contemporaries still believed that evils and misfortunes came as a result of the sins of their ancestors.

They also believed that God might punish people "out of love", in order to "test" them. If they accepted such punishments with faith, then the suffering would be changed into a blessing, which would help them toward a more profound knowledge of the Law, and their sins would be more readily pardoned. The teachers of the Law, scrupulous and meticulous in their discussion of these ideas, taught that no punishment that came from God's "love" could ever prevent a person from reading and studying the Law. Therefore blindness was always viewed as a great curse and true punishment; it was clear proof that a person had sinned or that his ancestors had.

It was precisely in regard to such an extreme case of a "divine punishment", the case of the man born blind, that Jesus challenged such beliefs, declaring that neither had the man sinned nor had he inherited any sin from his parents (John 9,1-41). Jesus was categorical: no sickness is ever a punishment from God; responsibility for sins is individual; sins are not transmitted from parents to children. In order to make this clear to people, Jesus drew on a reflection of the prophet Jeremiah from many centuries before: if the parents eat sour grapes, the children will not have their teeth set on edge (Jeremiah 31,29-30).

Interview 35
YOUR HOLINESS, YOUR REVERENCE?

RACHEL We're on the air again with our enthusiastic and faithful audience of Emisoras Latinas. Some of you have called us to express your disapproval of the way we're handling this special coverage of the second coming of Jesus Christ. Specifically, Jesus, they are criticizing us for the way we're treating you. They say we're not respectful enough to you as a person.

JESUS And why do they say that, Rachel?

RACHEL Well, you know how I myself, out of respect for your dignity, was at first calling you "Master", but you corrected me and asked me to call you simply Jesus.

JESUS Because I think that nobody is Master. Only God.

RACHEL Today we're going to open up a citizens' forum so that all of our listeners can give their opinions about the title we should use when addressing Jesus Christ. Our telephone number is 714-4000, seven-one-four-four thousand, and we're awaiting your calls…. Hello? The first call is from Santiago, Chile.

CHILEAN If they call the Pope, the head of the Catholic Church, "Your Holiness", then they should call the one who's over the Pope "Three Times Holy". That's my opinion.

RACHEL And what is yours, Jesus Christ?

JESUS Well, I think that business of calling a man "Your Holiness" is…, it's an insult to God. Because only God is holy. Nobody on earth should be addressed that way.

RACHEL We have another call… Yes, we can hear you…. This time they're calling from Argentina.

ARGENTINIAN Respect preserves respect. If we bow and genuflect before religious authorities, then I say, madam reporter, we should do so with both knees before Jesus Christ.

RACHEL What do you think about that, Jesus?

JESUS I don't like that idea, not at all. They told me that once my friend Peter entered a city and a centurion saw him and threw himself at his feet. And Peter, as boastful as he was, told the man, "Get up, I am a man just like you. Why should you kneel before me?"

RACHEL So you don't approve of kissing people's rings and hands and all that?

JESUS In my time that kind of pomp was what the emperors demanded, because they thought themselves to be gods. But what I'm seeing right now is that some people, who *think* they're emperors, are still indulging in the same nonsense.

RACHEL Another call! Havana, Cuba? Go ahead, friend.

CUBAN My idea is that if Christ's successor is called the Pope, then the title that best befits Christ himself is Super-Pope.

RACHEL Super-Pope? What do you think of that, Jesus?

JESUS Pope is just another word for "papa", and that's what I used to call God, because of the confidence I had in him. But nobody should assume that name for himself, because there is only one Father, the one in heaven. I said that quite clearly in one of my discourses.

RACHEL I don't know if you're aware that Catholic priests call themselves "father", and that some nuns are called "mother".

JESUS Fathers and mothers? But don't they claim they have no children?

RACHEL Another call's coming in….

WOMAN What about monsignor? Could he be called monsignor?

RACHEL Monsignor is an Italian word, meaning "my lord". That's what the bishops and the cardinals like to be called.

JESUS And would you like to be somebody's slave and call him your lord?

RACHEL Some text messages are arriving with other suggestions your excellency, your most reverend eminence … How do you like those?

JESUS I think God will take all those flowery titles and will burn them with a fire that never dies.

RACHEL So what title does that leave us with?

JESUS With none at all, Rachel. Brothers and Sisters. That's what we are.

RACHEL And for addressing you?

JESUS Jesus. That's who I am.

RACHEL In this rather… drastic manner we close out our citizens' forum, even though our telephones are still ringing. On the road between Jerusalem and Jericho, for Emisoras Latinas, this is Rachel Perez reporting.

MUSIC

ANNOUNCER Another God is Possible. Exclusive interviews with Jesus Christ in his second coming to Earth. A production of María and José Ignacio López Vigil, with the support of the Syd Forum and Christian Aid.

INTERVIEW 35: BACKGROUND MATERIAL

The word "Pope"

The word "Pope" comes from the Latin "papas", and this comes from the Greek "pappas", which is an affectionate word for "father". It means simply "papa" or "daddy". In the East this was a title of respect given to bishops and presbyters, and starting in the third century it was used in the West for bishops. The first bishop to have himself called Pope was Siricius, who was bishop of Rome from 384 to 399. He was also the first to describe the decisions he made as "apostolic".

Using this title of Pope, the church of Rome gradually imposed itself on all the other churches. Starting in the fifth century the title was used especially for the bishop of Rome, and in the eighth century the title became exclusively his: "*Papas Urbis Romae".* In the twelfth century Pope Gregory XI officially ordered that this title be used solely for the bishops of Rome.

The title of Pope is sometimes also taken as an acronym for the Latin words *"Petri Apostoli Potestatem Accipiens"* (the one receiving the power of the Apostle Peter). In the eleventh century Pope Urban II proposed this title for the bishops of Rome on the basis of another acronym: "*Petrus Apostolus, Pontifex Augustus"* ("Peter Apostle [one sent], Pontiff [bridge builder], August [consecrated]" = PAPA). Still another explanation is that Pope [Papa] comes from joining the first syllables of the Latin words *Pater* [father] and *Pastor* [shepherd].

Extreme arrogance

Whatever their origin, there is obviously much arrogance and vanity in the titles and formalities that are used to address Catholic hierarchs (and that even they themselves use). This is a retrograde custom that betrays the express command of Jesus himself (Matthew 23,4-11).

The Catholic hierarchs also bestow titles of preeminence on their friends. According to the German historian Horst Herrmann, the Vatican sells titles of nobility with ecclesiastical origins, and those who wish to sport such a title can buy one for as much as 150 thousand euros. There are extreme cases. One of the nearly 500 "saints" canonized by Pope John Paul II was the Spanish priest José María Escrivá de Balaguer, the founder of Opus Dei, a Catholic organization which has enormous financial resources and a membership of some 80 thousand men and women dedicated to promoting an elitist, opulent and sectarian kind of Catholicism, in imitation of their founding father. Escrivá was a man from a humble rural background, but for reasons of vanity he purchased (though not from the Vatican) the title of "Marquis of Peralta" in order to boast of noble rank.

The followers of this new “saint” and his organization devoutly visit a bunker on Bruno Buozzi Street in Rome, where they descend a staircase that leads to a luxurious crypt containing the remains of Escrivá, located in front of an altar. After the death of Escrivá in 1975, the members of Opus Dei made it known that their founder had programmed everything so that this cult to him would begin right after he died: he specified the velvet cushion that should used to display his corpse, the names of the those who should embalm his body and make his death-mask, the lock of hair that should be put on display for his devotees, and the marble commemorative plaque that should be placed in the crypt. On the plaque were to be engraved only the words: “The Father”. It would be difficult to find any other “saint” who indulged in such unevangelical arrogance.

Jesus was not in agreement

Jesus expressly prohibited calling anybody Master, Father, or Teacher (Matthew 23,8-12). The story of Peter and the Roman centurion Cornelius, which Jesus mentions to the reporter Rachel, appears in the Acts of the Apostles (10,24-26). The whole of Jesus’ message and his way of dealing with people entailed a complete rejection of the arrogance and superiority that are expressed not only in words, but in all the external formalities demanded by the powerful in order to appear important and assure their subordinates’ submission and obedience. Even though this business of titles might seem to be an irrelevant or trifling matter, that is not the case. Hierarchical language, formal protocols, and elaborate ceremonies are all very real expressions of the kind of power that understands itself as imposition, and not as service.

The more hierarchy, the more ceremony

Formalities, whether they take the form of language, behavior or attitudes, always say much about the use and abuse of power. One of the reasons that contemporary societies have enormous difficulties in achieving a democratic consciousness among their citizens is that public events – political, social, academic, both right-wing and left-wing – are rife with protocols, stereotyped behaviors, and high-sounding words. There is a shocking lack of simplicity and spontaneity in public life. Getting rid of a lot of the customary ceremonial behavior would do a lot to encourage genuine sentiments of equality. All formalism – especially the most extravagant kind – is a manner of asserting hierarchy, and consequently a way of leaving no doubt about who holds the power, who must be obeyed.

The Peruvian sociologist and psychoanalyst Guillermo Nugent has made a study of the obsession with paraphernalia demonstrated by Latin American military officers and Catholic ecclesiastical bigwigs. He concludes: *The more hierarchy there is, the more important is the ceremonial aspect. It would be a serious error in judgment to think that the problem is reducible to a conflict between formality and informality, since it is precisely the ceremonial events that are the principal means for recognizing and affirming identities.*

The leadership of the Christian churches has not been faithful to the egalitarian and “democratic” message of Jesus and, with the exception of certain historical Protestant churches and a few atypical Catholic figures, the hierarchies cultivate in their churches and in their leaders a pompous ostentation that is quite contrary to the gospels.

Interview 36
ATHEISM?

RACHEL We're interviewing Jesus Christ today on a bend of the road that goes from Jerusalem to Jericho. This desolate landscape was the setting for one of his most important and memorable parables. Isn't that true, Jesus, or am I mistaken?

JESUS No, you're not mistaken. One day the teachers of the Law asked me which was the greatest of all the commandments.

RACHEL And they didn't know it themselves, even though they were teachers?

JESUS They knew it quite well. Love God and love your neighbor, I told them. But they insisted "And who is my neighbor?" They were out to provoke me.

RACHEL And what did you do?

JESUS I told them a story that I knew would provoke them! Once there was a man who was wounded by bandits on this same road where we are now. A priest passed by and made as if he didn't see him. A Levite also passed by and took no heed of him either. Finally, a Samaritan came by, approached the wounded man and helped him out. After telling the story, I said to the teachers of the Law your neighbor is the one on the roadside; your neighbor is the one who needs your help. I also told them of those three men, the Samaritan was the only one who loved God.

RACHEL And did the provocation work?

JESUS They left there furious.

RACHEL But why furious?

JESUS Because of the Samaritan. When I was a kid, I always heard people saying "Samaritans are filthy pagans." They despised them because they weren't pure Jews and didn't mix with anybody. And to top it all off, the Samaritans didn't believe in the priests or in the Temple or in the God of the Jews.

RACHEL Were they atheists?

JESUS That's not a word we used in my time. But yes, the Samaritans didn't believe in our God. They were… they were just that atheists regarding our God.

RACHEL What does that mean? Can somebody be an atheist regarding one God and not another?

JESUS There are false gods, like the idols. They should be dethroned, and people should stop believing in them.

RACHEL Are you referring to the present-day crisis of faith?

JESUS In my day the ones who caused the crisis of faith were the priests, with all their privileges, and the Levites, with all their laws and more laws.

RACHEL Well, nowadays something very similar is happening. You must have noticed. Many people claim to be atheist because of the bad example of the priests and the pastors…

JESUS Blessed are those atheists, for they shall find God.

RACHEL A new beatitude?

JESUS Look, Rachel, what the Jerusalem priests were really adoring was an idol that demanded blood sacrifices, imposed unbearable burdens, rejected women and sick people… I rebelled against that God, and I told my fellow Jews not to believe in him either. I also was an atheist, an atheist regarding that God.

RACHEL So you don't condemn atheism?

JESUS How can I condemn it? It can be a short-cut for finding the true God. You have to stop believing in false gods in order to seek and find the real God.

RACHEL Could you explain a little more this rather … bewildering statement?

JESUS I already explained it on this same road long ago. Listen, Rachel, when you find the true God, you don't have to look up in the sky or on either side of you. The priest and the Levite believed in a false god, a god in the clouds. It was the Samaritan who really believed in God because he saw the wounded man, drew close to him and became his neighbor. Only someone who loves his neighbor can believe in God.

RACHEL Reporting from the road of the good Samaritan and, as of today, the good atheist, in the desert of Judea, this is Rachel Perez, Emisoras Latinas.

MUSIC

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INTERVIEW 36: BACKGROUND MATERIAL

The road that goes from Jerusalem to Jericho

Even now, as in the times of Jesus, the road that leads from Jerusalem to Jericho is impressive for its starkness, flanked as it is by gray, arid hillsides. On one of its bends a small chapel, called the Good Samaritan, recalls the famous parable of Jesus (Luke 10,25-37). In making a Samaritan the protagonist of his story Jesus employed a real "provocation theology" in dealing with his adversaries.

Provocation theology

Although the Samaritans were descended from the original tribes that formed the people of Israel, a rebellion that occurred about one thousand years before the time of Jesus distanced them from the Jews in the south, who established their religious center on Mount Zion in Jerusalem, while the Samaritans established theirs in Sichem and on Mount Garizim. Two centuries later the Samaritans went into exile and mixed with other ethnic groups, which made them even more "different" in the eyes of the Jews. By the time of Jesus the Samaritans were looked down upon by the Jews, especially the teachers and doctors of the Law. Moved by a mix of nationalism and racism, the Jews felt a profound contempt for the Samaritan people. They thought that the Samaritans did not believe in God, because they believed in "another" God, different from their own, and they celebrated "other" cults in "another" temple.

Spanish theologian José María Marín has commented on Jesus' use of the "theology of provocation": *When reproaching his listeners for their conduct or urging them to follow his preaching and counsels, Jesus often provoked an emotional shock in them in order to free them from the usual twisted interpretations,. When he told the parable of the Good Samaritan, the expectation of his audience was that, after the lack of sympathy shown by the Jewish priest and the Levite, a just Israelite would then appear as the "hero" who would help the battered traveler. But the one who arrived as the "hero" was the inveterate enemy: the heretic, the Samaritan. Jesus frustrated all the expectations of his listeners to show them that in God's kingdom all borders between human beings disappear, since all of us are neighbors. By upsetting the expectations of his audience, Jesus aroused their emotions and thus guaranteed a stronger reaction.*

Where you say God

In the 1970s the Spaniard Ricardo Cantalapiedra produced a song that became very popular; it set to music the poem "Mistakes" of Bishop Pedro Casaldáliga: *Where you say law, / I say God; / Where you say God, / I say liberty, justice and love.*

Lying behind the verses and the melody are the basic questions: what do we mean when we say "God"? what does it mean to say that "we believe in God"? If we want to be coherent, we should not answer the question, "Do you believe in God?", with a quick yes or no. We should require a more precise definition: "What God are you talking about?" This is quite necessary, since there is perhaps no other word in the dictionary so full of contradictory meanings as the word "God".

The idea or ideas expressed in the word "God" have an extremely long history in the rugged trajectory through which human consciousness has traveled. There has also been a long process of gradually transforming the idea of God and of developing it in accord with the advances in philosophy, politics, sociology, natural science and various theologies arising from the larger cultural context. However,

this process has not moved at the same pace or in the same way in the world's different cultures or among diverse peoples, much less among different individuals.

So it is that in the 21st century many people who are super-modern in their ways of dressing, speaking and acting can still believe in an idea of God that is basically medieval: they believe in a God who determines all historical events and orders all natural disasters; they believe in a God who rewards and punishes communities and individuals to demonstrate his omnipotence or to test the people's faith; they believe that God governs their lives and decides their destinies. Such believers are modern themselves, but their God is pre-modern.

Where is God

The question about the meaning contained in the word "God" becomes more urgent and distressing when God appears linked to structures of exploitative and criminal power. Such historical linkage is the root of many of the world's "atheisms", especially in Latin America, the most Christian continent on the face of the earth, and also the one with the greatest social inequalities.

A song of the Argentine group Atahualpa Yupanqui, "Little Questions about God", is one of many that gave dramatic expression to this problem during the years when liberation theology was strongest, which were also the years of the military dictatorships, terrible social injustices, and songs of witness and protest throughout Latin America. The song goes thus:

One day I asked: / Grandpa, where is God? / My granddad became sad / and didn't answer me. / My granddad died in the fields / without prayers or confession, / and the Indians buried him / with cane flutes and drums. / After a while I asked: / Dad, what do you know of God? / My father became serious / and didn't answer me. / My father died in the mines / without doctor or protection; / the boss's gold is/ the color of miners' blood. / My brother lives in the mountains / and has never seen a flower. / Sweat, malaria, snakes / are the life of the woodcutter. / And nobody should ask him / if he knows where God is. / Such an important person / has never passed by his house. / I sing along the roadways, / and when I am in prison / I hear the voices of the people, / who sing better than I do. / There is a concern on Earth / more important than God, / and it's that nobody should spit blood / so that another can live better. / What God looks out for the poor? / Maybe yes and maybe no. / But it's a sure thing that he dines / at the table of the boss.

Neighbor: the one to whom I "draw-nigh"

In the face of so many kinds of "atheism" that are prompted by the bad example of people who commit injustices and cooperate with abusive power and yet claim to represent God, Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan is quite revolutionary and challenging: Jesus is saying that God is not in the temple or in fulfillment of the law, but in our neighbor, in the relation that we establish with our neighbor, when we "draw-nigh" (become neighbors) to those who need us. *Neighbor is not only the one whom I find in my way, but the one in whose way I place myself:* such is the formula of Gustavo Gutiérrez in his pioneering book *Liberation Theology: Perspectives* (1973). In the provocative parable told by Jesus, the person who "understands" this principle and puts it into practice is not one of "God's official representatives", but a Samaritan, an "atheist" as far as the Jews were concerned.

Atheology, a philosophy

The French writer and philosopher Georges Bataille (1867-1962) proposed in 1950 to write a book called “Summa Atheologica”, thus amending the title of the classical “Summa Theologica” of Thomas Aquinas. Bataille’s idea was to gather together in his treatise arguments and texts which would lead the reader to an informed, serious and healthy atheism. The idea of “atheology” was born with this thinker, who was never able to carry out his project.

The idea was taken up again recently by the French philosopher and professor Michel Onfray in his book, *Atheist Manifesto* (Arcade Publishing, 2007), which offers a critique of the three great monotheistic religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. The book defends the value of atheism as a positive humanistic and constructive stance, and it even proposes that atheism be taught in the schools as a regular subject. According to Onfray, the true “father” of atheism as a systematic philosophy was the French Catholic priest Jean Meslier (1664-1729), a true revolutionary who at the end of his life wrote a book called *Superstition in All Ages: Common Sense* (BiblioBazaar, 2007). In that book *he offered clear and evident demonstrations of the vanity and falsity of all the divinities and all the religions of the world*.

There are two aspects to the defense and justification of atheism: one is the negation of God’s existence, and the other is more complex: it involves the questioning of certain ideas of God, which have perhaps been those held by most people in determined epochs of history or in determined cultures and countries. In the course of history many people who never denied God have been denounced as “atheists” and have been burned at the stake or killed for their “unbelief”, but they were persons who simply rejected the “truths” about God which were those officially preached by religious institutions with repressive power. They were deemed “atheists” because they denied hell, predestination, original sin, the Pope’s authority, the virginity of Mary, etc.

A “Short bibliography on atheism and the history of Christianity” can be found at www.angelfire.com/az/ateismo/bibliografia.html, This site [all in Spanish] contains a great variety of interesting and suggestive titles and authors.

The God meme

Denying the existence of God is no easy task – and the reasons for this are not spiritual or moral. The British scientist Richard Dawkins in his book *The Selfish Gene* (Oxford, 2006) has demonstrated the existence of “other” genes, different from the biochemical structures that by replication and biological transmission constitute the information that helps to shape our bodies.

These “other”, non-biological structures are called “memes”, which are defined as units of thought – ideas, values, concepts – created by our brains and replicated and transmitted culturally, from one brain to another. Like biological genes, “memes” appear, disappear, and recombine, and some of them prevail over others. The Oxford English Dictionary offers the following definition of “meme”: *An element of culture that is self-replicating and that is transmitted by means of imitation.* According to Dawkins, in all the cultural heritage of humanity there is no meme as universal and as persistent as the “God” meme.

Jesus transformed the idea of God

Through his words and actions, Jesus transformed the idea of God that was dominant in his time, in his culture and in his land. He opened the way so that humankind could form an alternative idea of God. The greatness of Jesus is found there, and it is for that reason that he has been a source of inspiration for so many people. In this sense Jesus was truly an “atheist” regarding the God that was dominant in the religious culture of that time, just as all of us are atheists regarding almost all of the gods in whom human beings have believed in other times and places.

Jesus was innovative and provocative in the way he contrasted his idea of God with that of his fellow Jews. He called God “papa”, and on several occasions he compared God to a woman. He told people of a God who never makes anyone sick and never discriminates against anyone; a God who is neither vindictive nor nationalist; a God who takes the side of the outcasts: women, children, widows, the infirm, the poor, the landless, the husband-less, the disreputable. He rejected the religion of sacrifices offered to gain God’s favor, and he gave priority to the “religion” of human relations. And, in the name of God and with a passion that inspired many of his compatriots, he confronted the priests (sacred men), the Sabbath (sacred day) and the Temple (sacred place). He called into question and swept away any and all hierarchy based on those dichotomies so characteristic of traditional religions: sacred-profane, pure-impure, saint-sinner. These revolutionary revelations of Jesus transformed the idea of God and located God in a completely different “place”. And it was because of these ideas that Jesus was persecuted and eventually murdered.

Jesus is the historical reference for all those who believe in another image of God and in another “place” where the “divine” can be found. From Jesus onwards, divinity will never again be found in the political theocracy of Judaism; it will be found only in the transcendence that lies within human relations based on mutual caring, equity, inclusion, compassion, solidarity, etc. The God of Jesus will never be found in dogmas, in laws or in the political institutions of Christianity.

Interview 37
JESUS' PERSONALITY?

RACHEL The mobile unit of Emisoras Latinas is now moving further south, to Qumran. On all sides we see a desolate landscape, and just behind us is the Dead Sea. We have wandered around the ruins of the legendary monastery which once housed the Essene monks, who were contemporary with Jesus of Nazareth. You already told us, Jesus, that you were never went to this monastery.

JESUS No, as I already mentioned, only the sons of certain Judean families came here. Besides, I have to admit that I wouldn't have liked these surroundings much.

RACHEL Because of the isolation and the silence?

JESUS And being far removed from the people.

RACHEL John the Baptist was here, wasn't he?

JESUS He was, yes. Later on he separated from the Essenes and went into the desert to preach. John was a prophet like the ones of days of old. He fasted, wore camel's skin, and ate locusts.

RACHEL Didn't you fast?

JESUS Me? No, I didn't. And a lot of people were scandalized by that. My fellow Jews were like spoiled children. They were never satisfied with anything.

RACHEL Why do you say that?

JESUS Because when they spoke of John, who neither ate much nor drank wine, they'd said, "He has a demon." And when they spoke of me, who was always mixing with the people, they'd say, "He's a glutton and a drunkard."

RACHEL Did you like to eat?

JESUS Eat? Of course I did. Who doesn't?

RACHEL But there must have been some forbidden foods.

JESUS None at all. I always said that what sullies a person is not what goes in by the mouth, rather it is the words that come out of the mouth. No food is prohibited by God.

RACHEL Not even pork? What do you think of kosher food?

JESUS I don't know what that means. But I believe that all animals are good creatures of God. All of them.

RACHEL And wine? Did you also like wine?

JESUS Well, I never ended up like Noah, under the bar, but … the wine of Galilee is very good. Have you ever tried it?

RACHEL For sure that must have been the kind of wine that flowed freely in that wedding feast in Cana.

JESUS Ah, those weddings were marvelous affairs. Whenever there was a wedding, the celebrations lasted seven days, and all of us ate, drank, sang, danced…

RACHEL Did you dance too?

JESUS Of course I did. All my brothers and sisters were excellent dancers. And my mother too.

RACHEL If I were to ask you what's the thing you like to do most of all, what would you tell me?

JESUS Conversing. I've always liked to talk with people, discuss with them. It's for that reason that these lonely, silent places… Since I was a kid I liked to tell stories. And I was really great with riddles -- in what way is the Kingdom of God like a mustard seed? And I told jokes. Do you know the one about the greedy priest?

RACHEL I know the one about the mustard seed, but, off the record… how does the one about the greedy priest go?

JESUS Well, look. Once there was a priest praying to God. "Lord," he said, "what are a hundred thousand years like for you?" "A hundred thousand?" said God, "the same as a minute." "Lord," the priest prayed again, "what are a hundred thousand gold coins like for you?" "A hundred thousand gold coins?" said God, "the same as a penny." "Then, Lord," said the priest, "I beg of you, give me a penny." And God answered him, "Granted. Just wait a minute."

RACHEL [laughs] What a funny joke! Ahem… Let's continue our interview. We were talking about the Essenes who lived in this monastery. They lived isolated, far from civilization; they fasted and looked for God. In the present time there are thousands of your followers who are religious, monks and nuns, who do the same thing. But listening to you talk now, I'm wondering if it was really you who counseled them to flee from the world.

JESUS My "counsel" right now is that we go find something to drink. Let's "flee" from this heat, what do you say? Perhaps we'll even find a little wine in those shops. Come on, let's go, Rachel. I know some other jokes that'll get a good laugh out of you.

RACHEL Friends in our listening audience, we'll take up that question about monks and religious men and women in our next interview. Meanwhile, from Qumran, with a great view of the sunset over the Dead Sea, this is Rachel Perez, Emisoras Latinas.

MUSIC

ANNOUNCER Another God is Possible. Exclusive interviews with Jesus Christ in his second coming to Earth. A production of María and José Ignacio López Vigil, with the support of the Syd Forum and Christian Aid.

INTERVIEW 37: BACKGROUND MATERIAL

We know so little

It is surprising how unconcerned the evangelists were with describing Jesus' personality. We have to piece together and imagine what he was like psychologically on the basis of the scant data the gospels give us about his actions and speech. Like the prophet he was, Jesus must have had a passionate, sensitive personality in the face of the human suffering and the injustices he saw in his society. He must have been impatient, ardent, extremely gifted in human relations and capable of powerful poetic speech, full of conviction.

Jesus was not an Essene

The Essenes were a Jewish sect that arose about 200 years before the time of Jesus; it was founded by priests of the Jerusalem Temple who were critical of the corruption that prevailed in the Temple. Jesus knew about them. There are indications that John the Baptist had relations with them and perhaps even belonged to their community. Scholars have speculated that Jesus also was an Essene, but the sect's discipline, which included much silence and constant ritual ablutions, was quite alien to what Jesus practiced and preached. The gospels make it clear that Jesus, because of his frequenting feasts and parties and always mixing with the riffraff, was accused by his enemies of being "a glutton and a drunkard" (Matthew 11,19; Luke 7,34).

The fasting the God desires

For the Jewish people fasting was a way for people to humble themselves before God. It was practiced in order to make prayer more effective, especially in times of danger or tribulation. There were fast days dictated by religious law, when the whole people were to abstain from food, to commemorate the great national calamities or to implore divine aid. Some people also fasted out of personal devotion. In the time of Jesus this practice had assumed much importance in the religion, especially among the Pharisees, who had the custom of fasting twice a week. Because of his Essene connections, John the Baptist most likely encouraged his disciple to practice fasting.

As were other religious practices, fasting was harshly criticized by the prophets of Israel, since it had become a sort of spiritual blackmail: unjust men thought that by fasting they could gain God's favor while forgetting about what was essential in religion, namely, justice. The prophets made it quite clear what kind of fast God desired: *freeing the oppressed, sharing one's bread, opening the doors of the prisons* (Isaiah, 58,1-12).

Jesus did not fast, nor did he recommend that others fast. None of the traditional penitential practices of Christians (fasting, abstinence, flagellation, corporal punishment) had its origin in the counsels or the practices of Jesus of Nazareth. Rather, all such practices are at variance with his basic message, and some of them were discredited by Jesus himself.

Eating or not eating pork

Hogs were domesticated by human beings about five thousand years ago. The prohibition against eating pork appears both in the Bible and in the Koran. Even today practicing Jews and Muslims strictly adhere to the religion norm of not eating pork. Anthropologist Marvin Harris explains that taboos in human societies are the result of "adaptations" to the environment in which they develop. From this perspective he considers that the taboo against eating pork arose because the very hot Palestinian climate made raising hogs rather difficult, while it was much easier and more profitable to raise sheep and goats.

On of the more recent and surprising hypotheses that help us understand this tradition better is offered by the Jewish archeologist Israel Finkelstein, director of the Institute of Archeology of the University of Tel Aviv. He explains that historically the people of Israel actually never lived in Egypt and never conquered a "promised land". He holds that the Israelites had always lived in Palestine and that it was in that land that they gradually organized themselves, in the course of time, into a people with a distinctive identity.

According to Finkelstein, the proto-Israelites were the only people of that region that did not eat pork, even though hogs were commonly raised there. The proof that they did not eat pork is that no bones of pigs have ever been found in any of the ancient Israelite villages that have been excavated. When Finkelstein was asked the reason why they never ate pork, he answered: *We don't know. Perhaps the proto-Israelites stopped eating pork because their adversaries ate a lot of it, and they wanted to be different. The biblical prohibition comes about 500 years after the practice itself began. For this reason, when present-day Jews observe this prohibition, they are simply perpetuating the most ancient practice of their people's culture, which has now been verified by archeology.*

The pure and the impure, water and wine

Most ancient religions believed that in the world there are persons, things and actions that are impure, and that correspondingly there are persons, things and action that are pure. Both the pure and the impure are "contagious". Religious impurity does not have to do with external dirtiness, nor does religious purity have to do with cleanliness. Neither do those concepts have to do with morality, with what is "good" or "bad". Rather, the "impure" is whatever is charged with dangerous, unknown forces, and the "pure" is whatever contains positive powers. Anyone who approaches what is impure cannot approach God. The dichotomy between purity and impurity is essentially a "religious" one.

From very ancient times the religion of Israel had assimilated this form of thinking and had developed a multitude of laws designed to guard against impurity. Such laws had to do with sexuality (menstruation and blenorrhagia were forms of impurity), with death (a corpse was impure), with some infirmities (leprosy and madness made those who suffered them impure), and with some foods and animals (buzzards, owls, and hogs were impure animals, along with many others). Most of these laws are preserved in the book of Leviticus.

As the people evolved from a magical religion toward a religion of personal responsibility, these ideas tended to fall into disuse. Nevertheless, in the time of Jesus some groups insisted on observing them scrupulously; they therefore practiced prolonged and painstaking washings or purifications with water in order to make themselves pleasing to God. Neither Jesus nor the members of his movement practiced such washing rituals (Matthew 15,1-20). Jesus called such customs into question and made it clear that he did not practice them. In fact, the famous “miracle” at the wedding in Cana can be read precisely as a symbol of Jesus’ rejection of such beliefs. Water was the symbol of the interminable purifications which were required by Jewish laws and which tended to equate religion with strict adherence to external norms. And it was precisely water that Jesus transformed into wine, a symbol of feasting and joy and for that reason also a symbol of freedom.

A religion of joy

Religiosity is often closely related with solemnity and seriousness. For many Christians laughter has no place in the house of God. The catechism of years gone by told us that we know that Jesus cried because it says so in the gospels: he cried when gazing on Jerusalem near the end of his life, and also before the tomb of his friend, Lazarus of Bethany. But the same catechism claimed that Jesus never laughed, because no gospel account makes any mention of his laughing. This is an untenable conclusion. Every human person laughs. Laughter and humor are signs of wisdom, and Jesus was a supremely wise human being. There are evangelical groups that consider dances, parties and drinking sinful, but Jesus went to weddings, drank wine, and ate everything. He paid little heed to the puritanism and ritualism of the religious people of his time. And he always compared God’s kingdom at the end of history to a great banquet, to the merriment of a great party.

Interview 38
A VOW OF CHASTITY?

RACHEL This is Emisoras Latinas broadcasting from the monastery of Qumran, where the famous Dead Sea Scrolls were found. After our last interview with Jesus Christ, some priests and nuns have called, feeling very upset and frustrated. They say that they have renounced the pleasure of the world in order to follow you, Jesus.

JESUS And what pleasures have they renounced?

RACHEL I suppose the pleasures of eating well, dancing, enjoying life… Some monks even renounce talking.

JESUS They don't talk?

RACHEL Only the most essential. They say that by silence they come closer to God.

JESUS What craziness! Wasn't it God that gave us a tongue to speak and ears to hear?

RACHEL What's harder for them is not getting married. They claim that it was you who ordered them to renounce matrimony; you told them to become eunuchs for the Kingdom of Heaven – to get castrated.

JESUS They say I told them to get castrated?

RACHEL According to them, you said that some people are born that way, and that others make themselves that way to follow you.

JESUS That certainly sounds a lot like the people of my time they used to sing when they should have cried, and they cried when it was time to sing! They understood everything backwards.

RACHEL But then, what did you mean when you spoke of the eunuchs?

JESUS What I meant was that each person must travel along his or her own path, in freedom, without prohibitions. And that all the paths lead to God if you have a pure heart. If you want to get married, get married. If you don't want to get married, you'll have your reasons.

RACHEL However that may be, your church proposes the life of celibate chastity as the way of perfection.

JESUS That can't be so, because if everybody followed that way, the world would come to an end. God wouldn't call perfect something that would ruin his creation.

RACHEL So what, then, is the path of perfection?

JESUS The one that each person is on, if they really walk on it with freedom and love. There's no one path. In God's house there are many places, and each person has to discover his or her own.

RACHEL So, according to you, the virginity that is practiced by priests and nuns is not a state that's superior to matrimony? It's not more spiritual?

JESUS How can it be superior and more spiritual? I always used to compare the Kingdom of God to a wedding banquet, never to a monastery or a desert. Because God is love, and what is most like God is the love of a couple.

RACHEL Well, these people renounce all partners and even mortify their own bodies in order to elevate their spirits. They flagellate themselves, beat themselves.

JESUS And who gave them their bodies, if not God? The body is sacred, it is the temple of God. How can they punish the most beautiful thing they have received?

RACHEL They punish it and they hide it. Didn't you see in Jerusalem? They walked through the streets wearing black habits, buttoned up cassocks, extravagant headgear. Just look at those people who are getting out of that bus over there, coming to visit Qumran.

JESUS Who are they?

RACHEL I'm not sure, but to judge by the crosses, the chains, and the footwear,… I think they're called Legionaries of Christ, … or Heralds of the Gospel, I'm not sure. That is to say, they are your soldiers.

JESUS My soldiers?

RACHEL That's what they call themselves.

JESUS And why do have such strange clothes? Look at me, Rachel. How am I dressed?

RACHEL Just normally, like an ordinary person. We'd say "casual". Maybe that's why the other reporters aren't looking for you, because they see you as just like everybody else.

JESUS I think that the Kingdom of God is leaven, Rachel. Tell the people who are listening to your program that if the leaven is separated from the dough, it spoils. The Kingdom of God is salt. If the salt is hidden away, it loses its flavor. It dies, like the waters of this Dead Sea.

RACHEL So, then, from the Dead Sea, this has been Rachel Perez reporting for Emisoras Latinas. We remind our listening audience that this interview and all the previous ones with Jesus Christ can be found on the internet at www.emisoraslatinas.net.

MUSIC

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INTERVIEW 38: BACKGROUND MATERIAL

Sexuality: sacred pleasure

There are religions that accept the human body, and there are others that revile it, but there is none that ignores it. All the religions have a tendency to control the two principal functions of the body: nutrition and sexuality. Since sexuality is such a vital drive and is closely linked to the meaning of life and death, it has been a primary concern of all religions.

In the ancestral religions of humanity there were many rites that exalted fertility and the feminine principle as a symbol of the divine and the sacred. With the advance of the patriarchal religions – that is, all of today's religions – all this changed.

Sexuality as the source of sin

The myth of Adam and Eve and their original sin, which is a foundational myth for Judeo-Christian culture, already expresses a profoundly patriarchal vision. This myth was very soon understood by Christianity as the explanation for the origin of all the world's sufferings and evils, as proof that we are born evil and contaminated by sin, and as the reason for the body's inferiority to the spirit. The myth has also served as the basis for discriminating against women, since they are all "clones" of Eve and therefore bearers of a body which is temptation, risk, and a vehicle of sin. Women are the "gateway of the devil", according to Tertullian.

This cluster of morbid ideas, quite foreign to Jesus' message, though already present in the Judaism of his time, received reinforcement from similar prejudices that existed in Hellenistic culture. Contempt for the body took firm root in the doctrine of the Church Fathers, who had a profoundly negative view of sexuality, especially female sexuality. Sex and sexual relations ceased to be an expression of sacred pleasure, a sublime vehicle of human communication and a metaphor for God's love, and became instead something dirty, negative and degrading. From the very first Christian centuries such negative views of sexuality led to ideas about how celibate chastity, sexual abstinence, and refraining from all corporal contact with women constituted the height of virtue, bringing people closer to God and leading them to "perfection."

This anti-sexual vision soon became fixed in theology, got translated into prohibitive laws, and affected the whole of Christian spirituality. Today all Christian sexual morality is heir to the taboos derived from the myth of Adam and Eve, especially the morality promoted by the Catholic Church, which, for example, even now considers such an innocuous and normal expression of sexuality as masturbation to be something "intrinsically and gravely disordered".

In recent years theologians from all the continents have been working to develop an alternative vision of sexuality, but the damage that has been done to entire generations is incalculable. We might even claim that the trivialization and cheapening of sexual relations that is common today among wide sectors of the population is a visceral reaction against the unbearable weight of the taboos that have been imposed during many centuries of repression and obscurantism.

Other cultures aren't like this

The native peoples of Latin America were quite bewildered by the divorce between sexuality and divinity that Christianity promoted. In the pre-Columbian societies sexuality was celebrated as a powerful, sacred force that helped the community to develop and become bonded with the divine. As opposed to the Jewish God, who was male and solitary, the original pre-Columbian traditions always worshiped both goddesses and gods; these deities practiced sexual love and thus projected a sacred aura around the equality of men and women in the community.

In contrast with Christian traditions, which consider sex to be taboo, something hidden away and never talked about, the positive, sacred vision of sexuality that the Native American peoples have engenders many rites that are still practiced among them. For example, the rites of initiation which mark the passage from childhood to adulthood are spiritual feasts and celebrations in which young people begin their sexual education, an education in which women always play a key role.

Even today, among the peoples of the Andes, the youngsters practice "trial matrimonies" (*servinacuy*): they live together for a year before deciding to marry. All the Latin American peoples celebrate female menstruation and use natural, herbal contraconceptives to avoid or interrupt pregnancies. Those of us living in the "advanced" countries have much to learn from the treasure house of beliefs and customs that these peoples have developed over the centuries.

At odds with sexuality

All cultures have, in one form or another, exercised some control over sexuality, which is viewed as a wondrous mystery, but also as a terrifying human activity full of contradictions.

Christian suspicion of and opposition to sexuality is fostered by several beliefs. One is that spirit and matter are enemies and that God is pure spirit. On the basis of this belief it has been taught that the most "spiritual" path involves negation of the body: all sexual pleasure and bodily delight are seen as negative, or at least suspect. Such ideas got translated into the law of celibacy, the vow of chastity and the dogma that sexuality must never be separated from reproduction.

Another belief that promotes enmity with sexuality is the idea that the body is transitory, an outer casing that we will lose at death, when only the immortal soul will survive. Such beliefs gave rise to the teaching that by sacrificing the body and making it suffer we put ourselves on the road to spiritual perfection. Another pernicious idea is that God became flesh in Jesus in order to suffer in his body, and by means of that suffering to save us. Thus it was long taught, and is still taught, that imitating Jesus means suffering and offering him our sufferings.

The naked body

The naked body is the most expressive symbol of sexuality, but since sexuality is taboo in Christian culture, nakedness has been associated with sin and subsequently with our dirty, stained, sinful human sexuality. Indeed, nakedness was the first "shameful" consequence of Adam and Eve's sin of disobedience!

This shame regarding nakedness explains the provocative, taboo-breaking power of the photography of Spencer Tunick, a U.S. artist born in 1967. After traveling around the U.S. photographing naked groups of people in urban landscapes, he toured different cities of the world creating artistic photographs of huge crowds of naked men and women. In Glasgow, Rome, Montreal, Sidney, Barcelona, Sao Paulo, Santiago de Chile, Caracas and Mexico City this ingenious photographer has brought together hundreds and even thousands of persons (20 thousand in Mexico in 2007), who voluntarily offer to serve as models in his evocative graphic compositions.

These images have a strong esthetic and emotional impact. There is no pornographic or erotic intention in them; rather they seek *to contrast the vulnerable naked human body with the anonymity of public spaces and to make people reflect on the tensions that exist between the public and the private, between the tolerated and the prohibited, between the individual and the collective.* Ecologists and nudists support this initiative, and those who have participated in it as voluntary models have emphasized the feeling of freedom they experience when posing for Tunick.

As a sign of the vulnerability that poor people experience when faced with cruel exploitation and the abuses of power, there has been a proliferation of protest demonstrations in which small farmers or social activists demand their rights, wearing only their birthday suits! They are demonstrations that cause a great impact, especially when the bodies exposed are ones that have been exhausted and worn out by hard labor and tough living. Whatever the protest is about, it demonstrates the profound symbolic power of the naked body, which expresses many aspects of human reality and not just the one which Christian tradition has for centuries assigned to it: sinfulness.

The body is sacred

Punishing the body with penances – flagellations, hair shirts, fasts, denial of pleasure in eating, sexual abstinence – is unchristian. One of the most telling aspects of Jesus' message and work was his concern for the sick, his healing of bodies. Physical health was a priority for Jesus. It is therefore the height of contradiction to claim that reviling the body and inflicting pain on it are types of behavior that are pleasing to God, and yet that has been the Christian claim for centuries and is still so today in many churches.

Like photons

The most scathing analysis of religious and clerical life as a "way of perfection" or a "superior state" has been offered by the German theologian Eugen Drewermann in his polemical book *Clerics: Psychogram of an Ideal* (Editorial Trotta, Madrid, 1995). Using brilliant irony and drawing on his lifetime experience as a psychoanalyst, Drewermann analyzes the traditional trio of essential negations (sexual drive, personal goods, and freedom) to which "clerics" (including religious men and

women) submit themselves by their three vows “for God”. He then makes use of a metaphor from quantum physics:

If they are faithful to the ideals of their profession, they live almost like photons, those minimal, electrically neutral particles whose task is to light up the world, but which, if they come to a stop, dissolve into nothingness, because in a state of repose their mass is zero… In their total identification with their profession, clerics suffer an innate fear that without a life of activity and effort they will be transformed into nothingness…. They are persuaded that their mission is to illuminate the world, and they imagine that the best way to carry out that project is by avoiding all interaction with even the least strand of humanity, of “matter”…

And it must be repeated endlessly: in our world of today, a hundred years after the discovery of psychoanalysis, no holiness is possible if it is not fully human. It’s a shocking fact, however, that the “joy in Christ” experienced by so many priests and nuns can often be shown to be totally lacking in freedom and excessively rigid in form, because in practice it based only on an attitude of duty and obligation, conceived apart from – and even against – their deepest feelings.

Eunuchs

Matthew’s gospel (19,10-12) is the only one that mentions Jesus’ saying about “eunuchs” (that is, castrated or impotent men, sterile men, men without wives or children). Jesus “classifies” eunuchs into three types: those that are born so (perhaps the barren and the impotent), those who were made so by others (castrated men who served in the royal courts as guardians, singers, and artists), and those who became so “for the Kingdom of God.”

In Israel religious law prohibited the castration of men, and also of cattle. A castrated man could not enter the Temple or the synagogue, nor could a castrated bull be offered as sacrifice. Nevertheless, castrated men were a familiar phenomenon, since there were many of them in the courts of the kings of Israel, who were influenced by the customs of neighboring countries or brought foreign eunuchs to Israel as slaves. Given this context, there is great significance in the narrative in the Acts of the Apostles (8,26-40), according to which an Ethiopian eunuch becomes one of the first followers of Jesus. The story clearly condemns the traditional exclusion from the Jewish religion of foreigners and those stigmatized by castration.

Since the Catholic Church historically did not allow women to sing in the churches, the custom developed of selecting the boys with the best voices and cutting off their testicles before they reached puberty, so that their voice would not change. This practice was known as “sopranization” or musical castration. For many years these “castrati” served in the church choirs. The last of them was Alessandro Moreschi, a singer in the Vatican, who died in 1922.

What was Jesus referring with his third category, those who were “eunuchs for the Kingdom of God”? Rather than a “way of perfection”, he was speaking of the kind of passion that absorbs a person’s whole life and energies, a sense of mission that is given a passionate priority in one’s life. Jesus referred only to male “eunuchs”. Knowledge and appreciation of the characteristics and specificities of female sexuality is a very recent achievement of science and psychology. Furthermore, since in the culture of his time it was not the women who decided whether to get married or not – their fathers

decided that for them – Jesus could not even imagine anything like female “eunuchs”.

Jesus: married or not?

Some interpreters believe that with his saying about eunuchs Jesus was giving an explanation of his personal situation. They go further and claim that Jesus remained single, not because he feared women or was homosexual or was castrated, but because the Kingdom of God required it of him in order to serve God better, since the celibate single person is the one who best serves God.

We really don’t know whether Jesus got married or not, or whether he was a widower. We don’t know how many times he fell in love or with whom. We don’t know if he had children. It is difficult to imagine him single, since Jewish culture looked askance at men and women who remained unmarried and childless. It would have been difficult for Jesus to have had the authority and the appeal that he had with people if he were considered “weird”. But we simply do not know, and we never will know. What we do know is that, whatever might have been Jesus’ family situation, nothing of his message is changed by it. Those who wrote the gospels considered Jesus “civil status” to be an unimportant detail in comparison with the supreme importance of his message and his deeds, and for that reason they show scant concern for it in their narratives.

Interview 39
VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN?

RACHEL Emisoras Latinas arrives today in Jerusalem, along with Jesus Christ, who is visiting once again the capital of his homeland. He especially wants to walk the narrow, picturesque streets of the Arab districts. Is there any special memory, Jesus?

JESUS Well, all this has changed a lot, but it seems that it was around here that they dragged out that poor woman…

RACHEL You're referring to the story of the adulteress?

JESUS Yes, it was Joanna – I still remember her name.

RACHEL And I remember the movie, when that woman was discovered *in flagrante* by her husband and taken out into the street half-naked and disheveled. She barely escaped being stoned by that furious mob, thanks to your timely intervention, Jesus.

JESUS That whole thing was scandalous…

RACHEL Yes, it was something more suited to a sensationalist tabloid than a gospel text.

JESUS No, I mean scandalous in another sense. The religious laws of my country punished adultery with death, but the Jewish men applied those laws with two different standards.

RACHEL They applied them for their own benefit, I imagine, as you men always do. Excuse me, I didn't mean to refer to you, but it's just that…

JESUS They used to claim that a man committed adultery and was unfaithful to his wife only when he slept with another married woman. But if he was unfaithful to her with a single woman, a widow, a divorced woman, a prostitute or a slave, then he didn't commit adultery. And nobody punished him. The women, however, were judged by another standard whoever the man was that she slept with, she was an adulteress.

RACHEL And would they always kill her?

JESUS Yes, they would stone her to death. And since adultery was a public crime, the whole community would come out to throw stones.

RACHEL What a barbaric law. In some Muslim countries such laws still exist.

JESUS Great injustices were committed. Often mere rumors and terrible calumnies led to the death of innocent women. Many of the people throwing stones were men who had spent their whole lives deceiving their wives – they were unjust men who came forth to do justice! And in the name of God!

RACHEL I've always been very impressed by what you did then. You were very understanding and forgiving of that woman…

JESUS And why not forgive her? The tree of infidelity can have a lot of roots… But it was me they didn't pardon.

RACHEL Who? The old men who still had a hankering to throw stones?

JESUS No, I'm talking about Peter, James, John, the members of the movement. They were very upset and complained to me. They tripped up on the rock of scandal, and that rock was the laws of my people, which were causing so much harm to women.

RACHEL Tell us, was that the first time you saw a woman who was about to be stoned to death?

JESUS No, the stoning of women was something quite frequent. I had seen it happen other times. Can I ask you a favor, Rachel?

RACHEL Sure, what is it?

JESUS I want to say something to those who are listening to your program.

RACHEL Go ahead, Jesus Christ. The mikes are yours.

JESUS I also sinned, Rachel. I offended God. Even though as a child I knew that such things were going on, even though I saw that kind of cruelty close up, I never did anything to stop it. But that day, with that woman, God opened my eyes. That day I understood that the laws and the traditions that offend women also offend God. I understood that violence against women is also violence against God.

RACHEL Thank you, Master, thank you in the name of all the women who are listening to us. From Jerusalem, near what was called the Corner Gate, this is Rachel Perez, Emisoras Latinas.

MUSIC

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INTERVIEW 39: BACKGROUND MATERIAL

A very scandalous narrative

The story of Jesus and the adulteress appears only in the gospel of John (8,1-11), but is not found in all of the early manuscripts of that gospel that have been discovered. Some Bible scholars explain

that it was suppressed in the other three gospels and in the original manuscripts of John because the Jesus' position regarding the "sinful" woman – his leniency and his direct challenge to the religious law that ordained stoning – were considered excessive and even scandalous by the first Jewish Christian communities, whose members had all been formed in a culture that discriminated against women.

Paul: in Christ there is neither male nor female

Violence against women has very deep roots in the patriarchal religions. The Judaism of Jesus' time was a completely patriarchal religion. Jesus' attitudes with regard to women were scandalous in the eyes of his contemporaries. Etymologically, the Greek word "scandal" refers to a "stone on which one trips".

Despite all the "tripping" of the first communities, they could not suppress completely the teachings of Jesus regarding the equality of all human beings, and therefore the equality of men and women. Even though Paul in his writings reflects his very traditional Jewish formation, he also uses many expressions which no doubt caused a great impact on people of his time. The most well-known and oft-quoted of Paul's texts in favor of gender equality is this: *In Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus* (Galatians 3,26-28). What is particularly relevant in this text is that the Jewish Paul is explicitly repudiating the prayer that Jewish men recited daily: *Blessed are you, Lord, for making me a Jew and not a Gentile, for making me free and not a slave, and for making me a man and not a woman.*

Stoning: a form of torture

Stoning is a very ancient method of execution. It is really a form of torture, because death arrives very slowly, and this increases the suffering. The person to be executed by stoning is tied to a stake or else buried up to his or her waist so as to be unable to flee.

As people have become more conscious of human rights, this cruel torture has been gradually eliminated from most law codes. In Sharia or Islamic law there are still sex offenses, especially adultery committed by women, that are punished by stoning, just as in the time of Jesus, but this barbaric custom is no longer practiced in all Muslim countries. The penal code of Iran dictates stoning as the punishment for adultery and specifies that *the stones used should not be so great that they would kill the person with just one or two blows, nor so small that they would not be considered stones.* According to Amnesty International, after several cases detected in Nigeria in 2006, other isolated cases were discovered in Afghanistan, Iran and Iraq.

To avoid simplistic prejudices and to gain a more nuanced view of the situation of women in Islam, the works of the Moroccan writer Fatima Mernisi are extremely helpful and are also quite interesting. Especially provocative for western culture is her book *The Harem in the West* (Espasa Calpe, 2006).

Adultery and the law of the funnel

In ancient Israel adultery was consider a public offense, and the most ancient laws punished it with death. In the course of the years religious tradition and customs, controlled of course by males,

applied a male chauvinist interpretation to this law, as to so many others,. Thus, the adultery committed by a married man was an offense only if the relations were with a married woman, but if the woman was single, a prostitute or a slave, then the relations were not criminal and were not considered adultery.

This was the law of the funnel: in the case of a woman, a crime was committed if she had relations with any man at all who was not her husband. Traditionally a woman suspected of adultery was submitted to a public test: they made her drink bitter waters. If her stomach swelled up, it was proof that she had committed adultery. If she experienced no ill effects, the suspicions were considered groundless (Numbers 5,11-31). This test was carried out on a daily basis by a priest at the Nicanor Gate of the Temple of Jerusalem, but no men were ever submitted to such a humiliating ordeal.

Stoning: a communal punishment

In Jesus' time, once adultery was proved, the woman was sentenced to be stoned by the community. Since adultery was a public offense, it had to be eradicated publicly and collectively. The neighbors of the locale where the sinful woman had been discovered were the ones responsible for stoning her to death. Generally the stoning took place outside the city or the village. Those who witnessed the actual offense had to be the ones who threw the first stones. Other offenses punished with stoning were blasphemy, divination, violation of the Sabbath rest, and various forms of idolatry.

Endurance, patience, suffering: women's virtues

The Judaism of Jesus' time discriminated against women, and nowadays Christianity continues to discriminate against them, even if the cruelest laws of the Bible are no long applied. To understand the degree of discrimination that still exists in the Catholic Church, it is worthwhile examining the document issued in May 2004 by Cardinal Ratzinger, then prefect of the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith and later elected Pope. The decree, pretentiously titled "Letter to the bishops of the Catholic Church on the collaboration of men and women in the church and in the world", does not contain a single line of reflection on or condemnation of violence against women, a topic which has finally in our own days become a subject of much concern, debate, research and action in all parts of the world.

In this document, however, Ratzinger writes as follows about women: *They are the ones who, even in the most desperate of circumstances, possess a unique capacity for bearing with adversities, for making life possible even in extreme situations, for tenaciously preserving a sense of the future, and, finally, for recalling with tears the high price of giving human life.*

This quote only reinforces the quality that society reserves especially for women: putting up with suffering at the expense of one's own life, enduring without despairing. Such conceptions encourage the perverse idea that women should silently suffer all the violence committed against them. Instead of denouncing it, they should bear with it; instead of freeing themselves, they should have patience. Many women are taught a providentialist theology (all that happens is the will of God) and a religious valuation of sacrifice and abnegation as meritorious before God (Jesus saved us by suffering). As a result they are made to interiorize as a value the submissive, patient suffering of violence, because "it is the cross they must bear"; it is "the way they will win heaven."

The representatives of Jesus are not like Jesus

The abyss existing between Jesus' way of treating women and the present-day positions of the churches who claim to represent him is immense. The Catholic feminist theologian and religious, Elizabeth A. Johnson, is quite correct when she states in her book, *She Who Is* (Herder, 2002): *The essence of the problem is not that Jesus was a man, but that most men are not like Jesus, since their identity and their relations are defined on the basis of the privileges they receive from a patriarchal culture.*

Mercedes Navarro Puerto, another Catholic feminist theologian and religious, is also correct when she reflects as follows: *Why do they ask, "What's happening with women, that they have so many conflicts with their religion?" instead of asking, "What's happening with religions, that their women feel so at odds with them that they are slowly but steadily abandoning them?"*

A growing awareness

There is a growing consciousness throughout the world, on the part of both women and men, regarding the unspeakable injustice which is violence committed against women simply because they are women. This growing awareness represents a colossal advance in the consciousness of humankind. The Uruguayan writer Eduardo Galeano makes a telling commentary on this in his reflection on "the global fear", which he describes as *women's fear of men's violence and men's fear of women without fear.*

A contemporary political concern

Of course, no process of growing awareness is linear, and in many parts of the world religious arguments still have a considerable influence on governments as regards the matter of gender equality and the role and rights of women. These religious arguments always, in the long or the short run, generate violence of different sorts.

In the countries of Latin America the influence of church criteria on national governments is quite evident, but not only in Latin America. The European Women's Lobby, an organization which unites 18 European and international bodies and non-governmental organizations from 25 countries of the European Union, issued on May 27th, 2006, a report which expresses concern in this regard; it is called "Religion and the Rights of Women". The report states in part:

We observe that the more conservative political climate during the last decade in Europe and around the world has allowed for a growing influence of religion – of all religions – in Europe. We recognize the threat presented by religions when they refuse to challenge those patriarchal cultures which uphold for women only the roles of spouse, mother, and housewife, and refuse to adopt positive measures for the benefit of women. This is especially conspicuous in two of the principal religions, Islam and Christianity; it is evident above all in the Roman Catholic Church and in the more fundamentalist Protestant currents. (See: www.mujereslobby.org)

A scientific concern

In his own time Jesus understood well the nature of the hierarchical and patriarchal Jewish religion that based itself on the Bible. This same type of religion has been preached and practiced for centuries by Christianity and has served to reinforce the prejudices of the other two monotheistic religions, Judaism and Islam. Such religion has covertly been the most persistent and perverse root of discrimination and violence against women.

Patriarchal religions that promote discrimination and violence affect the daily life of all women and have negative influence on their psychology and even on their cerebral development. The neurologist Rita Levi-Montalcini, winner of the Nobel Prize in medicine, recently celebrated her 100th birthday with extraordinary mental lucidity; in one of her last interviews she stated that *as regards cognitive functions, there is no difference between men's brains and women's. Differences are found only in the cerebral functions related to the emotions, which are linked to the endocrine system, but since religion marginalizes women with respect to men, it effectively hinders their cognitive development.*

Jesus was a child of his time

Like all human beings, Jesus was a child of his time, and his time and his land were steeped in patriarchal customs and culture, which were profoundly discriminatory against women. One of the most original aspects of Jesus was his rebellion against that culture. He expressed that rebellion in the way he received and treated women and in his repudiation of the laws that humiliated women and subordinated them to men. The story of the adulteress is clear proof of his nonconformity in this regard. In this story we see in Jesus not the reaction of a religious administrator who, thinking himself superior and therefore able to forgive, acts benevolently toward the sinner. Rather, Jesus' posture is that of a lay person who dares to violate religious laws and openly challenges those who hypocritically follow such laws and use a double standard.

Jesus was a child of his time, and yet he was also the herald of new times. Being the child on one's time means being born in a society which has made normal behavior that needs seriously to be questioned. It means living in a society which has become anesthetized in the face of situations, laws, customs and prejudices that are simply expressions of a particular culture and so can be changed, since they are only cultural fabrications.

Awakening from anesthesia, understanding that what the culture has forged is not "natural", and changing the customs is always the fruit of a long process. Why can we not imagine such a process in Jesus himself? Why can we not believe that Jesus' own consciousness about the harm that the religious laws of his time were doing to women kept evolving during his life? Why can we not think that, like so many men of all times, Jesus finally understood that offenses against women were offenses against God and that, acting on this sentiment and this conviction, he had to revise his earlier attitudes, correct them and repent of them?

Interview 40
SACRAMENT OF CONFESSION?

WOMAN *Bless me, Father, for I have sinned…*

PRIEST *Yes, my child, …*

WOMAN *Father, it has been one month since my last confession…*

PRIEST *For your penance, recite forty Our Fathers and forty Hail Marys…*

RACHEL Our indiscrete microphones are located today in the Church of the Redeemer, right in the heart of Jerusalem. As in previous days we are joined by Jesus Christ. Let's talk about what's happening right here, Jesus a confession.

JESUS Please explain to me what *is* happening, Rachel.

RACHEL That young woman is telling the priest all the sins she's committed. And the priest is pardoning her sins.

JESUS I see the young woman, but where's the priest?

RACHEL He's hidden in that thing that looks like a wooden cage.

JESUS But tell me, Rachel, whom did she offend? The priest who's in the cage?

RACHEL I don't think so…

JESUS Then why is she asking him for pardon?

RACHEL Because… because that's the way confession is.

JESUS How strange.

RACHEL Why do you say strange?

JESUS Because if she offended someone else, why is she asking the priest for pardon?

RACHEL Well, according to the catechism, this is one of the seven sacraments that you yourself instituted.

JESUS That I instituted? I think that … Listen, why don't you consult one of those friends of yours that know so much about religious matters?

RACHEL It seems there's some "confusion" about "confession"! Hold on, give me a minute. I can contact Rafael Martínez Arias, who belongs to the movement of Christian base communities of Madrid. Let's see if we have any luck with my cell phone… Hello, Senor Martínez Arias? I'm call you from Jerusalem with a very particular question what is the origin of the sacrament of confession? … What's that you say? … The Irish monks? … About 500 years after Jesus Christ?

JESUS Rachel, I'd like to hear too. Can't you do something so that his voice can be heard more loudly?

RACHEL Yes, wait, I'll turn up the volume.

RAFAEL This private form of asking for pardon was devised by the religious superiors of some monasteries in Ireland. That way they could know even the most intimate thoughts of each one of their monks. From Ireland the practice spread to other countries. Centuries later a Pope, Innocent III (who was not at all innocent!), imposed that style of confession as the obligatory norm for all Christians.

RACHEL Why do you speak so negatively of that Pope?

RAFAEL Because he was an arrogant guy. He was surrounded with luxury and was mixed up in a lot of dirty business.

RACHEL But why was that Pope interested in imposing confession on people?

RAFAEL Well, it was a time when there was much discontent with the church authorities, so the Pope had this idea from this time on, every Christian had to confess his or her sins to the priests. And he told the priests cross-examine those who confess in order to learn their religious and political opinions.

RACHEL And that's the way the sacrament of confession was born?

RAFAEL Just as I've told you. It was that 13th-century Pope who made it obligatory. It really was a measure aimed not so much at pardoning people's sins as at finding out what those sins actually were. The aim was to uncover heresies and identify dissidents.

JESUS Ask him if the people accepted that terrible yoke on their necks…

RACHEL Here Jesus Christ is asking if the people submitted themselves to that control imposed by Pope Innocent III.

RAFAEL No, they protested constantly. But after Innocent the Third came the Fourth, Innocent IV. With that son of [beep]… I mean, with that Pope there began the horrible tribunals of the Inquisition.

RACHEL Thank you for that information, Rafael. What do you think, Jesus, about what we just heard?

JESUS It's a heavy yoke, it's an unbearable burden placed upon the children of God.

RACHEL So it wasn't you, after all, who established the sacrament of confession?

JESUS No, it wasn't me.

RACHEL And you don't take responsibility for the secrecy, the confessionals, the lists of sins, the penances?

JESUS I don't know anything about all that. I spoke to people about pardon, about forgiveness, but what I said was very different.

RACHEL Tell us what you said.

JESUS I'll tell you, but outside. I've never liked these temples. Come on, let's get out into the fresh air.

RACHEL So we're going outside, and our program will also, for a while, leave the airwaves. This is Rachel Perez, Emisoras Latinas, Jerusalem.

MUSIC

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INTERVIEW 40: BACKGROUND MATERIAL

A little history

Rafael Martinez is a Catholic who stopped going to confession a long time ago. He takes part in our program providing historical data that help us understand how this "sacrament" of penance was "born", since it does not have its origin in the liberating message of Jesus and has today become an obsolete practice for many Catholics around the world.

The first generations of Christians understood that the waters of baptism inaugurated a new life in the faithful and that the rite of baptism was sufficient to cleanse them from sin. This "cleansing" was understood in the first communities as a "conversion", a "change of life". It was not until the third century that the "sacrament of penance" – for sins committed after baptism – began to be practiced with regularity. For centuries the practice of penance was public, and the only ones who pardoned sins were the bishops. The "confession" was made to the bishop himself, as the first step of the rite, and the "penance" imposed usually consisted of the sinner's being excluded from eucharistic

celebrations for a longer or shorter time, according to the gravity of the sin. Penance was done only for the most serious sins. The "penitents" had to wear distinctive clothing so that everyone would know that they recognized their sinfulness.

"Private" penance – the rite that we are familiar with today and generally call "confession" – began in the sixth century, under the influence of Irish monks, as is explained in our program by Rafael Martínez, the Spanish layman who no longer goes to confession. Starting in the ninth century the liturgical books included instructions for the practice of private confession. Thus, what in the early centuries was a process that lasted days, weeks or months was reduced to only a short talk between the penitent and the confessor, who no longer had to be a bishop but could be any priest. After that the rite was extended to all Christian churches. The Fourth Lateran Council (1215) established the obligation for the faithful of confessing their sins to a priest at least once every year.

In the 16th century the Protestant Reformation rejected the practice of confession, claiming that no intermediary between God and human beings was needed.

The "crime of solicitation"

In the course of history, confession has led to murky practices which reveal how foreign to the gospel message this rite is. In 1713 the Inquisition tribunals issued an edict for Spain, Central America and the Philippines, in which they sought to forbid the "crime of solicitation", an offense that had already been censured in the bull of Pope Gregory XV, "Universi Dominici Gregis" (1641).

This crime consisted in the confessor's "soliciting" the penitent to grant him sexual favors in exchange for receiving absolution of her or his sins. According to Jorge René González Marmolejo, researcher for the National Institute of Anthropology and History of Mexico and author of the book *Sex and Confession* (INAH-Plaza and Janés, 2002), some 500 documents from the Mexican national archives and the Mexican Inquisition prove that the practice of "solicitation" was quite common, especially in the 18th and 19th centuries. The documents cite the testimonies of 348 women who incriminated themselves before the Inquisition because they felt culpable for having acceded to a "solicitation". In the 18th century it was one of the three offenses most persecuted by the Inquisition, along with forbidden literature and bigamy.

In the archival documents the crime of solicitation is described thus: the priest would ask his spiritual daughter or son during confession to perform "lewd and vulgar acts with him or with third persons"; such acts might include salacious words, sexual touching, or even intercourse. Sometimes the "solicitation" was related to a clandestine love between the confessor and the penitent. The edict of 1713 prohibited that the penitent kneel before the priest when confessing, because her/his head would be at a "compromised" height and "beneath the cassock many things could be done and concealed". The edict decreed that if the priest had to travel to the house of a sick woman, he should do so in the company of another cleric or religious and should hear her confession with the doors open. The confessor and the penitent were also prohibited from conversing before or after the confession.

The confessional

Those wooden “cages” called confessionals, which are still visible and in use in many places, especially in older churches, appeared for the first time during the Council of Trent (1542-1562). By that time the practice of “solicitation” had reached such an extreme that some priests were hearing confessions with the penitents sitting on their knees! It was felt that without a strict physical separation between confessor and penitent sexual harassment and sexual acts could not be stopped. The 1713 edict of the Inquisition dictated precise norms for how to build the confessionals, which had already been in use for more than a century. The instructions stated that the confessionals were to be installed in well-lighted, plainly visible places and that between the confessor and the penitent there should be, not doors or curtains, but dividers or screens with openings so small that fingers would be unable to pass through them and realize “erotic caresses”.

Interview 41
TO WHOM SHOULD WE CONFESS?

NEIGHBOR *Pay me now or I'll kill you, you dirty thief!*

YOUTH *Screw you, scumbag, now you're going to find out…*

RACHEL We continue now in the vicinity of the Church of the Redeemer in Jerusalem. After this unexpected street incident, things are returning to normal, and Emisoras Latinas renews its broadcast.

JESUS Why were those people fighting, Rachel?

RACHEL I have no idea. Perhaps because of some unpaid debt. [to radio audience] But this is a good opportunity for us to ask Jesus Christ, who once again is with us, what he thinks about what we've just seen. Certainly in your time, Jesus, you never saw things like that…

JESUS No, I saw people fighting over debts and resorting to violence… But listen, Rachel, weren't we just talking about confessing sins, there inside the church,?

RACHEL Yes, we were, and so…?

JESUS Well, this is a perfect example. What would those two guys who were fighting have to do in order to be reconciled with God? Go and confess to a priest who doesn't even know them? Who's hidden away in a cage inside the church?

RACHEL Well, even though I'm not the one being interviewed here – you are! – I'll tell you what I think I think they should fix things up between the two of them.

JESUS Exactly, that's what they should do. Because it makes no sense for me to offend Matthew and then go to confess to Zachary.

RACHEL But wouldn't it be better for them to ask for forgiveness directly from God?

JESUS The thing is, if you don't ask for forgiveness from your brother, whom you see, how can you ask for forgiveness from God, whom you don't see? If you don't pay back the person you robbed, what's the sense of paying somebody else back?

RACHEL Please speak clearly about this, Jesus. What should we do with this thing we call the sacrament of confession?

JESUS As that friend of yours, Rafael, just explained, this confession business has no doubt caused many people to feel guilty and fearful. I think we should forget about it.

RACHEL According to you, then, what should two persons who are at odds with one another do to be reconciled?

JESUS They should talk together, the two of them alone. They should forgive one another.

RACHEL And if they can't come to an agreement?

JESUS Then they should seek a third party and talk with him.

RACHEL And if they can't resolve the problem even among the three of them?

JESUS Well, in that case, they should present the problem to the community. That's what we used to do in our movement. I remember once when Peter was furious with James and John because of something they had said. "Forget it, Peter," I told him. And he said to me "This isn't the first time they been scheming together." "Forgive them, Peter." "How many times do I have to forgive those two scoundrels?" he asked me. Twice? Four times? Seven?

RACHEL And what did you tell him?

JESUS Not seven times, but even seventy times seven, Peter. That's the confession that has true value when people forgive one another.

RACHEL Nevertheless, Mr. Christ, I've gone through the gospels. And here, in John's gospel, you told the priests clearly "If you forgive the sins of anyone, they are forgiven." And it says also in Matthew's gospel "What you bind on earth will be bound in heaven." And so?

JESUS And so nothing. I said that, but not to any priest. I said it to the community. It's the community that pardons, not the priest. It's in community that we forgive one another, not in the dark corners of the temples.

RACHEL And not in those prayer and miracle services, where the pastors and preachers sing and shout and pardon the crowds?

JESUS We really don't need priests or pastors or preachers to forgive sins. What I said was quite simple. If you offend someone, ask the person for pardon and don't repeat the offense. If someone offends you, forgive him. And God, who lives in the community and knows what is in your heart, will also forgive you. Seventy times seven times he will forgive you. Always.

RACHEL We these new declarations of Jesus Christ we bring our program to an end for today. Rachel Perez, Emisoras Latinas, Jerusalem.

MUSIC

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INTERVIEW 41: BACKGROUND MATERIAL

Seventy times seven

Jesus reminds Rachel of a discussion he had with Peter, James and John (Matthew 18,21-35), which he concluded by telling Peter that he had to forgive "seventy times seven times".

In the Hebrew culture the number seven had a special significance, which originated from observation of the four phases of the moon, each of which lasts seven days. Because of that the Israelites came to associate the number seven with a "complete" period of time. Seven signified for Israel the "totality" desired by God. The Hebrew ordering of time was based on the number seven: the Sabbath, the sacred day, occurred every seven days. Forgiving seven times meant forgiving completely. Seventy is a combination of seven and ten. If seven was plenitude and totality, then ten – whose symbolic meaning derives from the ten fingers on our hands – also had the character of a "complete" number, although less so than the number seven. "Seventy times seven" means "always, without exception, despite everything".

It is in community where we forgive one another

The practice of the early Church understood individual conversion and forgiveness to be related to the community, whereas the theology of the Middle Ages held that the pardon of individual sins came through the mediation of a priest.

The practice of individual confession (the penitent before the priest, the secrecy, the enumeration and detailing of all one's sin) has for years now been called into question since it is a practice that intimidates people. For that reason, after the Second Vatican Council many Catholic communities developed new ways of celebrating this sacrament, in which the public declaration of sins was done away with, but the spirit of repentance was preserved. As the faithful humbly recognized the errors they had committed, the priest would give a general absolution to the whole assembly. These communal celebrations of penance represented an important advance, though it was still the priest who "pardoned". More recent developments, promoted by Pope John Paul II and out of step with Vatican II, have attempted to reinstate the practice of individual confession.

In other Christian churches there has always been more openness in this regard. For example, in "The Book of Common Prayer" of the Anglican Church the people are offered two options: either communal reconciliation in a penitential service or private confession, which is not obligatory; rather the rule is: everybody can, some should, nobody is obliged.

James, the brother of Jesus, in his letter (5,16) writes: *Confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed.* There are some people who see in this verse as an invitation

to confess one's sins "in community" and therefore to forgive one another in community, not necessarily with the mediation of a priest as the official "forgiver". In his first letter John speaks of recognizing and confessing our sins before God, not before a priest: *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness* (1 John 1,9).

The spirit of Jesus' message shows us that to be forgiven we must approach God and the community, and especially the person whom we have hurt with our sin. We forgive one another in confessing to one another the harm that we have done. In some cases, words will not be necessary, but only gestures, which at times are more eloquent than words. Sins are "forgiven" through personal repentance and the mediation of the community. Sins are "forgiven" through "conversion", changing our lives, repairing the damage done.

A clear message

Jesus spoke about forgiveness with such great clarity that it's hard to miss his message. He said that if we offend someone we should seek out that person and dialogue with him in order to be reconciled; if that doesn't work, we should ask a third person to "mediate" the matter; and if even that is not enough, then we should seek forgiveness in the community. This "formula" has much the same spirit as the methods that are used today in the negotiation of conflicts of all sorts.

The path that Jesus proposes is so clear, so effective and so sensible that it is difficult to understand how it got changed into a "sacrament" which seems to be aimed primarily at empowering some "sacred" person who "pardons". In the course of church history sacramental "confession" has spawned unsavory practices which clearly violate the respect and the dignity that should prevail in all human relations.

Interview 42
SINS OR CRIMES?

RACHEL Come over here, Jesus, since this street is really crowded.

JESUS Tell me, Rachel, what's all the noise about? What's that man shouting?

RACHEL I'm not sure.

JESUS Is it another fight in this same street?

RACHEL If you want, we can get closer.

PREACHER … And who was I, brothers, before I received the Word and was saved? I have committed every sin there is. I went to the bars and got drunk, and I beat up whoever got in my way. I abused women, and even young girls. I've robbed, brothers. I've falsified signatures and committed fraud. And how did it help me? In no way at all! Because I still did not know the Lord Jesus Christ. Blessed be his name!

CROWD Blessed be his name!

RACHEL He's talking about you, Jesus…

PREACHER I robbed, I fornicated, I even killed a guy who owed me money… And now you see, brothers, I have been rescued by my faith in Jesus Christ. Blessed be his name!

CROWD Blessed be his name!

RACHEL Where are you going, Jesus. Hold on.

JESUS I'm going to tell the bailiff …

RACHEL What bailiff?

JESUS The one who arrests criminals and takes them before the judge…

RACHEL Do you mean the police?

JESUS That man who's talking there is a criminal. He needs to be detained.

RACHEL Wait a minute. Didn't you hear that he already repented of his sins and …

JESUS What do you mean, he repented? Did he give back what he stole? And what happened to the widow and the children of the man he killed? It's easy to commit abominations and then ask forgiveness of God…

RACHEL Hold on a moment, they're giving me a signal from the studios… Friends of Emisoras Latinas, we are in contact with you once again from the streets of Jerusalem, and once again we have Jesus Christ with us. He has just heard, as you may also have heard, the testimony of an individual who says that he has been converted to the Gospel…

JESUS You put it well, Rachel. He *says* he has been converted, but faith without works is dead, it's useless.

RACHEL Well, at least he asked God to pardon him for what he did.

JESUS What does God have to do with this? I've already said it quite clearly if when you're presenting your gift at the altar, you remember that you have done something against your brother, leave your gift and go first to patch up things with your brother.

RACHEL And that means…?

JESUS That means that before going before the tribunal of God we must go before the tribunal of men and women. If you commit a crime, you have to pay for that crime. Blood is not washed away with prayers.

RACHEL So what do you propose, Jesus?

JESUS I remember a man named Zaccheus. I knew him in Jericho. He was a rascal; he had gotten rich by cheating poor people. But he heard the message of the Kingdom, and one day he said to me "To all those I have cheated I will make a fourfold restitution."

RACHEL And did he do it?

JESUS He said it and he did it. The thing is, Rachel, crimes are not erased with tears or with shouts, but by repairing the damage done.

RACHEL But what if what they've robbed is a person's dignity?

JESUS What do you mean by that?

RACHEL The crime of rape. I'm speaking about rapists. That guy who was preaching said he had even abused young girls.

JESUS And do you think that by beating his breast, like the Pharisees, he will be made clean?

RACHEL You should realize, Jesus, that the ones guilty of such abuse are often family members themselves, a brother, or even the girl's father… Or priests. Recently there have come to light a lot of cases of sexual abuse against boys and girls committed by priests.

JESUS And do those priests go to jail?

RACHEL No, they send them off to a monastery to pray and do penance.

JESUS Hypocrites. Anybody who commits such a crime should have a millstone tied around his neck, one of those driven by mules, and he should be drowned in the bottom of the sea.

RACHEL Wait up, Jesus, where are you going? We still haven't finished the program.

JESUS I already told you, I'm going to look for the bailiff. To tell him that a criminal is loose on that street corner.

RACHEL Well, I should go with you to present the accusation. From Jerusalem this is Rachel Perez, special correspondent for Emisoras Latinas.

MUSIC

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INTERVIEW 42: BACKGROUND MATERIAL

Perverse alchemy

What Jesus witnesses in a Jerusalem street can be observed quite often nowadays in evangelical churches, in sessions of new Christian groups, or in meetings of organizations like the Fraternity of the Full Gospel Businessmen. In settings such as these people "confess" their "sin" with shouts and rhetorical speeches and proclaim that they were pardoned when they "accepted" Christ as their savior. But often the "sins" of those who are preaching – extortion, robbery, forgery, maltreatment of their spouses, sexual abuse – are all crimes punishable by the law. They imagine that their "conversion" before God exempts them from going before the tribunals of justice and paying for their crimes.

Transforming crimes into sins is a perverse alchemy. It distorts the message of Jesus and favors a culture of impunity in the countries which suffer from an excessive tolerance of corruption and where the crimes committed by powerful people are easily "pardoned", since they are considered mere pecadillos, weaknesses, minor faults – they are sins that God always pardons, because "to err is human".

Zaccheus, a repentant criminal

Jesus recalls Zacchaeus, a man he once met when he was traveling to Jerusalem (Luke 19,1-10). Zacchaeus was a tax collector in Jericho, a city through which passed many commercial caravans. Along with Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea, he is one of the few rich persons who are reported to have changed their lives when they met Jesus and heard his message.

The taxes collected by the “publicans” (as the tax collectors were called) like Zacchaeus ended up in the Roman treasury. The post of tax collector was auctioned off by the Roman authorities and awarded to the highest bidder. The publicans then had to pay Rome for their rent and other costs, so that they earned little if they were honest in the rates they charged. For that reason they arbitrarily increased their rates and kept the difference for themselves. Their constant acts of fraud and their complicity with Roman power made them persons despised and hated by the people. In repenting of his crimes, Zacchaeus understood that it was not enough to claim that he had faith, if he didn’t also return what he had robbed. And he was harsh with himself, applying the Roman law, which required that offender make a fourfold restitution to the person who was robbed, rather than the Jewish law, which was much more lenient.

The sexual abuser: a familiar enemy

Various studies show that most cases of sexual abuse against girls or boys do not occur in the streets or in dangerous places outside their homes. They occur within the four walls of what is anything but a “home sweet home”, and the abusers are people who are well known: fathers, stepfathers, uncles, grandfathers, and brothers. This form of sexual abuse is called incest.

All sexual abuse is an abuse of power, but in contrast to the physical violence exercised by a stranger who commits a sexual offense, the relative or other person known to the child does not usually employ violence, but takes advantage of the confidence, the respect and the affection that the child has for him, in order to seduce the child and guarantee his or her silence.

Among the “well-known” persons who abuse girls and boy there are also priests and ministers. The crime that they commit in abusing minors sexually can also be considered incest since clergy and religious are for the children authority figures, like their older relatives, and since such offenders make use of the bonds of affection that they establish in schools, orphanages, catechism classes or church services.

There are a great number of films that treat, from different angles, the complex topic of sexual abuse in the home. Outstanding among them is “Shattered Trust” (1993) by U.S. director Bill Corcoran, which narrates the true story of a U.S. lawyer who in the course of dealing with cases of child sexual abuse comes to remember that when she was small her father had abused her. The personal and legal struggles of this woman contributed to eliminating the statue of limitations for crimes of child sexual abuse, so that they can now be denounced, tried and sanctioned even after many years have passed. Another film with a more commercial tone is “Dolores Clairborne” (Taylor Hackford, 1994), which is adapted from a Stephen King novel.

The most covered up crime

Incest has been the most covered up crime in all the world’s societies, and the cover-up is greater if those abused are boys. And thicker still is the silence when those who commit the crimes are priests and religious. The silence is thicker because the offenders are shielded by their superiors or because the victims do not dare to speak because of the “sacred” character of those who abused them.

In the United States during the 1980s the first denunciations of sexually abusive priests began to be heard. Since then there has been an increasing number of cases there, and hundreds more in Canada and throughout Europe. In chapter XI of the book *The Power and the Glory: Inside the Dark Heart of Pope John Paul II's Vatican* (Carroll & Graf, 2007), by British writer David Yallop, there is a highly detailed, chilling report on the great number of these crimes that were committed by Catholic priests, religious and bishops; they were discovered during the pontificate of John Paul II and then covered up with his complicity and that of the church's highest officials.

One of the cases that is not documented by Yallop in his book was that of the Jesuits in the United States, who had to pay $50 million to 110 Eskimos who suffered sexual abuse at the hands of a dozen of their missionaries in Alaska between 1961 and 1987. One of the lawyers of the victims declared that in some towns it was difficult to find an adult who was not submitted to sexual abuse by men who used religion and power to violate, shame and silence Eskimo children. And one of the members of SNAP (Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests) filled out the picture: *It would be difficult to imagine children who were more isolated and defenseless that those living in the remote villages of Alaska.*

"In the name of the Father"

The topic of sexually abusive priests has been treated more specifically in other books. Beside the documentation provided by Yallop, we recommend *Pederastia en la iglesia católica*, by Spanish journalist Pepe Rodríguez (Ediciones B, 2002), and *En el nombre del Padre: Depredadores sexuales en la iglesia*, by the Mexican journalist Carlos Fazio (Editorial Océano, 2004).

In the prologue of his book Rodríguez states: "In this book the sexual abuse of minors committed by clergy or by anyone else is treated as a 'crime', not as a 'sin', since in all the democratic juridical codes of the world sexual conduct with minors is classified as a crime."

Fazio's book documents several cases extensively, especially one of the most repulsive: that of the venerated and powerful founder of the Legionnaires of Christ, Marcial Maciel, a personal friend of Pope John Paul II, who never acted against Maciel even though he knew of his offenses.

Various films have also treated this topic. Noteworthy are "The Boys of St Vincent" (1994), directed by John N. Smith, which narrates a real-life case that occurred in a Canadian orphanage, and "La Mala Educacion" (2004), from Spanish director Pedro Almodóvar, who based the screenplay on his personal memories.

Just one case

The following is a report that an Irishman, Patrick Welsh, provided for a newspaper in Managua, Nicaragua, in 2007. It is just one case.

My little brother was 11 years old when he was abused sexually. Twenty-seven years later, in the year 2000, we became aware of the agony that he went through as a child and of the anxiety that he suffered in silence during most of his life. I come from an Irish Catholic family, and when the youngest son at ten years of age announced that he wanted to be a priest, the family was delighted.

He soon left for the minor seminary of the Holy Spirit Fathers, a missionary congregation, where he was to receive his secondary education and also prepare for the priesthood.

My brother was recruited by Fr Frank Bligh, the man in charge of seeking "vocations" for that same congregation. I remember him well: a man who was tender, sweet, always helpful; for 30 years he always presided at the most important celebrations of our family: birthdays, weddings, baptisms, funerals. He was always there to accompany us and intercede before God. He was our friend, and we had great affection for him. Nobody ever suspected that he was a child abuser until he was arrested in the north of England in the year 2000. The times had changed, and one child broke the silence, unleashing a tragic, macabre history of decades of sexual abuse.

In my family we learned about it when the police contacted my mother. Their investigations had revealed that my little brother, by then a 37-year old adult, had possibly been abused. At first he did not want to talk with the police, but later he gave his testimony and a little after that Father Bligh was arrested and accused of many cases of sexual abuse. At the beginning we did not want to believe that our dear friend and spiritual guide had committed such horrendous crimes against hundreds of boys, and much less against our brother. But we heard our brother and we believed him. There was no doubt that he was telling us the truth.

I remember something he said: "I was only hoping that mom and dad would die before Father Bligh did, so that I could then accuse him. I didn't want them to know about it because I didn't want to hurt them." My brother found himself in the impossible position of protecting the faith of his mother and father. For a while my mother personally felt sorry for Bligh, believing that he was sick man. However she soon realized that that was not the case. Bligh had used his position as a priest and his power as an adult man to violate the rights and the bodies of hundreds of minors, and he did so with premeditation. My brother recounts that when he was abused, the priest used to lock the door and hang his jacket over it so that nobody would spy in through the keyhole. Everything was coldly planned. … In June 2001 Bligh (I no longer call him Father) was sentenced to two and a half years of prison. He is one of 28 Catholic priests in Great Britain who were imprisoned between 1997 and 2001 for sexual abuse.

Interview 43
JESUS AND AIDS?

RACHEL Greetings to all you who are tuned in to Emisoras Latinas. We find ourselves today just outside old Jerusalem. Our guest, Jesus Christ, wanted to see what remains of the famous pool of Bethesda.

JESUS Lots of sick people used to gather here -- invalids, blind people, deaf people. They claimed that the waters were miraculous.

RACHEL The ones who gather here nowadays are the beggar and the panhandlers. Look at that fellow in the corner over there – he looks really dejected.

JESUS What do you think's wrong with him?

RACHEL I don't know, but he doesn't look well at all. He might even have AIDS.

JESUS AIDS?

RACHEL It's a sickness that didn't exist in your time. Today it's the worst of all diseases, a real epidemic.

JESUS Come on, let's go over near him.

RACHEL Be careful, Jesus!

JESUS Why do you say that?

RACHEL It's a very contagious disease. Don't you see how other people are avoiding him?

JESUS How are you, fellow?

RACHEL Don't touch him, Jesus.

JESUS Good day, my friend. Tell me, … what's wrong with you?

YOUTH Can't you see? They diagnosed me with AIDS a year ago, and look how I am now…

JESUS And they couldn't find any cure for your sickness?

YOUTH Only with lots of money can I get the medicines I need. My family is very poor – we're Palestinians from the north.

JESUS Ah, then we're fellow countrymen. I'm from Galilee too.

YOUTH My family didn't know what to do with me when they found out. The neighbors filled their heads with stories about how this was a punishment from God. Whenever the people saw me they ran away. So then I came to Jerusalem to see if I could find something better here. But all the hospitals have closed their doors to me. Besides being a Palestinian, I have AIDS!

JESUS You've suffered a lot.

YOUTH Maybe it's true that God is punishing me for something I did…

JESUS Don't say that. How is a father going to make his children sick if what he wants is for them to be cured? Look, right now we have to be going, but I'll be back tomorrow. Will you be here?

RACHEL Where else am I going to be? This is my hideout. You'll find me here, neighbor.

JESUS Till tomorrow then, my friend. What are you up to, Rachel? You were holding that gadget there all the time…

RACHEL Yes, our audience was listening to your conversation. It's a scoop Jesus Christ talking to a man sick with terminal AIDS! Can I tell you something?

JESUS Sure, tell me…

RACHEL For a moment I thought… When you shook hands with him, when you embraced him, I thought you would cure him… Ahem, … I was having a journalistic fantasy broadcasting the first miracle live on radio! But nothing happened.

JESUS It's too late now, Rachel. The ones who should have done something for him didn't do anything. They didn't give him the medicines that would have helped him. By telling him that it was a punishment from God, they made him sicker still. His family rejected him. And now they let him die in the street. Those were the miracles that he needed. They did him as much damage as people used to do to the lepers in my time.

RACHEL The thing is, the people are afraid of AIDS.

JESUS The people? You also were afraid, Rachel. When I approached that fellow, you told me not to get too close…

RACHEL Yes, that's so… The thing is…

JESUS That's just the way it was with the lepers. The religious laws demanded that they hide themselves away; it required that we reject them.

RACHEL But you cured some lepers.

JESUS Nobody knew how to cure that sickness. I just drew close to them.

RACHEL And that cured them?

JESUS That made them feel a little better. That fellow there feels the pain of his sores, Rachel, but isn't he more pained by the way his people have rejected him?

RACHEL AIDS the epidemic of the 21st century. The statistics are overwhelming. However, our sick neighbor is not a statistic. Is there nothing we can do for him? From Jerusalem, this is Raquel Perez, reporting for Emisoras Latinas.

MUSIC

ANNOUNCER Another God is Possible. Exclusive interviews with Jesus Christ in his second coming to Earth. A production of María and José Ignacio López Vigil, with the support of the Syd Forum and Christian Aid.

INTERVIEW 43: BACKGROUND MATERIAL

In search of miracles

The pool called Bethesda (House of Mercy) or Bezatha (the Pit), and in Greek the Sheep Pool, was located outside the walls of Jerusalem. In the times of Jesus sick people used to gather around it, asking God to cure them miraculously by means of its waters, which supposedly had wondrous powers. Many of those sick people were forbidden to enter the Temple of Jerusalem because their ailments made them "impure", so they were hoping to find there at the pool the divine mercy that religious law denied them by excluding them from the sacred precinct. Today, in the ruins where that famous pool once was, there are hardly any traces of water.

The first epidemic of globalization

In 1849, during the cholera epidemic which decimated the population of London, the physician John Snow discovered that most of the victims were drinking water from the Broad Street fountain; he consequently recommended that it be closed down and thus succeeded in resolving that serious public health crisis. Since then the study of epidemics has earned an important place among the medical sciences. In our own days AIDS has appeared as the first globalized epidemic, and dealing with the crisis of AIDS is an urgent challenge for all the world's societies. In Latin America Brazil offers an excellent example. For those who wish to learn about how this successful model for treating the disease was developed, we recommend the article "Brazil: a model for the AIDS crisis" at: www.envio.org.ni.

The figures of the pandemic

The AIDS epidemic threatens not only public health worldwide, but also human rights and economic development. According to the 2006 report of UNAIDS, more than 40 million people around the world

are living with HIV (human immunodeficiency virus) or are already suffering from AIDS. Four out of every ten persons living with HIV are women, and about 3 million of all those infected are less than 15 years of age. In the year 2005 some 5 million new infections were reported, and in the same year 3 million persons died from AIDS.

The U.N. Security Council recognized in January 2000 that the AIDS pandemic was a direct threat to national and international security because of the mutually reinforcing dynamics linking together AIDS, poverty and lack of information. The HIV epidemic intensifies poverty and feeds off it. If the "AIDS effect" is not taken into account, then the alternatives proposed for relieving poverty, both personal (migration, sexual work) and national (sweat shops, tourism), can create conditions and scenarios that will extend the epidemic even further.

In Latin America and the Caribbean there are estimated to be some 2 million people now living with the infection. Included in this figure are 150,000 new infections recorded just in 2005. The Caribbean is the second most affected region in the world, after sub-Saharan Africa, although its rates of infection are significantly lower than the extremely high rates of African countries. Interestingly, the western hemisphere countries that have the highest prevalence of the disease in relation to their population are two small Central American nations, Honduras and Belize, with about 1.5% of their adult population living with HIV.

The virtue at stake is not chastity, but justice

The defense of life and the threat that AIDS represents today for the survival of individuals, families and communities oblige us to reflect theologically about this epidemic. Liberation, the option for the poor, justice, mercy – all are biblical and theological categories that help us get closer to AIDS and to the impact it is having on the global society in which we live. Theologians around the world recognize that there is a serious lack of such theological reflection.

According to the priest Leonard Martin, professor of ethics at Ceará, Brazil, this lack of theological reflection is a challenge that neither European theology nor Latin American liberation theology have yet accepted. He claims that the perspective of gender highlights even more how great the lack of reflection and the challenge of AIDS are, since it has been shown that women are especially vulnerable in the face of the epidemic because of the male chauvinist culture that prevails in the world. In the field of moral theology the priest Enda McDonagh, a professor in Ireland, states that *the first theological response of a disciple of Jesus and a promoter of the Kingdom of God is to create a just society, and in the case of AIDS the virtue at stake is not chastity, but justice, understood not only as just distribution of goods, but also as the transformation of structures in order to achieve a just society.*

These and other reflections were aired at the first Latin American Catholic theological conference on AIDS, which was sponsored by Caritas International and held in San Salvador in September 2001. An interesting report on this meeting documents several initiatives and projects undertaken by Latin American Catholics who are trying to respond to the epidemic. Titled "AIDS: a sign of our times", the report was written by Nicaraguan specialist Pascual Ortells and can be found at www.envio.org.ni.

Narrowing differences with the Vatican

The rigid, even criminal, positions of the Catholic hierarchs against the use of condoms to prevent AIDS – such is the official doctrine of the Vatican – was discussed at length at the San Salvador conference. Bishop Jacques Suaudeau, then head of the Pontifical Council for the Family, was proposing that the prevention of AIDS should not be just a matter of distributing condoms: *It should be raised to another level, attacking the true social, economic, political and moral roots of the epidemic.* This position is now shared by UNAIDS. Given the seriousness of the epidemic, there has been a growing agreement on policy between the Vatican and international organizations. Caritas International has played an important role in this process.

Robert Vitillo, a U.S. priest who was co-president of Caritas International's AIDS task force, recounts: *In 1987 the United Nations and most national governments were making no mention of abstinence and marital fidelity as appropriate means for preventing AIDS. At one point Mr. Makajima, then director of the World Health Organization, requested a meeting with us and asked me: Why is the Pope against contraceptives? And I answered him: Why are you against matrimony?* The WHO director reacted by saying that they were not against matrimony, and Vitillo insisted that the advisories and messages issued by the United Nations *never mentioned matrimony or abstinence, even though these also were effective means for preventing AIDS.* Vitillo believes that since that meeting UNAIDS has had a better understanding of the position of the Catholic Church, and that little by little that health organization's messages have been changing.

Even though the Catholic Church has positively influenced public health messages about AIDS, the epidemic continues to this day to present the Church with a serious challenge, that of dialoguing openly about sexual rights and the ethical and anthropological aspects of sexuality. After a long history of rejecting sexual pleasure, of constant denigration of sexuality and of unrelenting misogyny, the resistances in the Church are still much greater than the advances. In some places the Catholic prejudice against the use of condoms and other devices for preventing AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases continues to exist and continues to be promoted from the pulpits, since the condom also functions as a contraceptive.

The most dreaded sickness: leprosy

In the course of history there have always been sicknesses considered taboo: they generate deep collective fears and are fatalistically related to some obscure doom. To understand the logic of these social and cultural constructions, we recommend the magnificent book of Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor and AIDS and its Metaphors* (Picador, 2001).

In Jesus' time leprosy was the principal tabooed illness. Leprosy was the sickness that most resembles AIDS in our own time, both for the infected people who feel excluded from society and for society itself, which fears and rejects those who are suffering the disease. Religious laws interpreted leprosy as a punishment from God and ordered lepers to be separated from their families and communities and to live an isolated existence in caves outside of town. When they were going along the roads they had to shout out or ring small bells to warn healthy people that they were coming. The leper was "impure", not from the point of view of contagion, but from the religious point of view: he was thought to be "accursed of God", and for that reason it was the priests' job to determine both the presence of the disease in a person and its cure, if such should come about. The Old Testament

contains very extensive and detailed legislation about leprosy. Since it was such a dreaded sickness, there was a popular belief that leprosy would disappear when the Messiah arrived.

The way Jesus approached lepers and touched them was more than just a sign of compassion and sympathy; it was a deliberate rejection of a religious law which he consider inhumane and unjust. Religious law forbade anyone to touch another person who was impure (Leviticus 5,2-4). For that reason, Jesus' gesture was revolutionary.

Interview 44
DOES HELL EXIST?

RACHEL Our mobile unit has moved to the south of the city of Jerusalem, near a ravine that is known as the Valley of Gehenna. We are joined, as in previous days, by Jesus Christ, who walked through these places when they were not as densely populated as they are today. What's your impression, Jesus? Has much changed?

JESUS A great deal, Rachel. In those days Jerusalem was very small. It was all contained within the walls. And this place was the dump.

RACHEL The dump?

JESUS Yes, it was the city dump. See that gate? In my time it was called the Rubbish Gate. In the evenings the women would go out through there and dump their food scraps, dried branches, dead animals, … Later the man who burned the rubbish sprinkled sulphur on everything and … whoosh! … it was set ablaze … [in exaggerated tone] Fire and brimstone!

RACHEL Listening to you, our audience will remember the descriptions of hell….

JESUS You're right. That terrible lie came out of this same dump. And now, when I see what's happening these days, I realize that it was the biggest lie of all, the one that has done most harm to the sons and daughters of God.

RACHEL What lie are you talking about that's so harmful?

JESUS Hell.

RACHEL But didn't you preach about hell yourself?

JESUS I preached God's love.

RACHEL Maybe you've forgotten, Jesus, but several times you referred to "the weeping and the gnashing of teeth" that there'll be in hell.

JESUS I talked like that when I became furious at seeing so many injustices. I used to say "It's better for you to enter the Kingdom of God lame or blind or crippled, rather than be healthy and whole – and burned with the rubbish of Gehenna." I was referring to this dump.

RACHEL In any case, why do you say that hell is the greatest lie of all?

JESUS Because it does not exist and never did exist.

RACHEL Do you realize what you're saying?

JESUS Of course I do.

RACHEL Just one moment, Mr. Jesus Christ. If my information is correct, believing in hell is an obligation of faith. Here it is in this book. In the year 1123 the Lateran Council proclaimed it, and more recently Pope Benedict XVI has also declared that hell exists.

JESUS Well, I say the contrary. You cannot believe in God and also in hell.

RACHEL For what reason?

JESUS Because God is love. How can you believe that God has created a torture dungeon ready to send people to? Would God make use of infinite torments, just to punish his disobedient children? That wouldn't be God. It might be Herod.

RACHEL So, God doesn't punish sinners?

JESUS God is like that father who had two sons. One was very good and obedient. The other was a rascal. In the end, the father embraced both of them, the good one and the roguish one.

RACHEL And all the scoundrels there are in this world – the ones who wage wars, who kill innocent people, who torture people cruelly – will they go unpunished?

JESUS Leave that in God's hands. God will know what to do with that rubbish. But you, when your heart condemns you, don't think about any hell. Remember that God is bigger than your heart and understands everything.

RACHEL What does our audience say about this does hell exist or doesn't it? Is there eternal punishment or isn't there? That topic is a hot one, and it seems to me that Jesus Christ still has more to say on it. Stay with us. Reporting from hell, I mean to say, from the Valley of Gehenna, this Rachel Perez, for Emisoras Latinas.

MUSIC

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INTERVIEW 44: BACKGROUND MATERIAL

The Valley of Gehenna

The Valley of Gehenna borders the city of Jerusalem on the west. In was the place where human sacrifices had been offered in ancient times to the pagan God Moloch; they were abominations that caused the prophets to curse the valley (see Jeremiah 7,30-33). About 200 years before the time of Jesus there was a popular belief that the valley would become a fiery hell for those people condemned for their wicked deeds. Since the place was considered disreputable and accursed, it was made into a public dump for the city.

The abyss of "Sheol"

For many centuries there was no belief in hell among the people of Israel. They thought that after life ended in the visible world the dead descended into "Sheol", a place located in the depths of the earth or beneath the seas, where both good and evil people would be mixed together and languish forever, experiencing neither joy nor pain. "Sheol" is mentioned 65 times in the Old Testament, always as a sad place where there was no hope for any change. The Babylonians also believed in a similar kind of place (Job 10,20-22; Psalm 88,11-13; Ecclesiastes 9,5 and 10). This same idea appears even in the book of the Apocalypse (1,18). The dogma of hell owes more to certain beliefs and philosophies of ancient peoples than to texts of the sacred scriptures.

The fire of hell

In the gospels the expression "fire of Gehenna" is often found in the mouth of Jesus, and it was always translated as "fire of hell". During the Middle Ages belief in hell as a place with real fire became common among Catholic theologians. In the 13th century Thomas Aquinas disagreed with the first Church Fathers, who understood the fire of hell in a metaphorical sense: he held that it was a theological certainty that the fire was real.

More recently the Vatican spoke about this "fire" and advised people that it should not be understood as a real fire that burns. Is this a case of doctrinal flexibility? Subsequently, in May 1979, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, under the direction of Cardinal Ratzinger (later to be Pope Benedict XVI), taught that *although the word "fire" is only an "image", it should be treated with all due respect.*

What does this "respect" mean? Mostly like it is intended as a synonym of "fear". It would not be rash to think this is the case, since in the course of the history of theology the flames of hell, its boiling cauldrons and its crematory ovens have been perpetually present in the church's preaching and catechesis. Such teaching has caused unspeakable and unnecessary suffering to whole generations of children and adults, creating a horrendous image of God, one that is totally foreign to what Jesus wanted to teach us.

Centuries of psychological terrorism

For centuries preachers, religion professors, priests, brothers, nuns and ministers have persistently taught young students and children about hell in lecture halls and catechism classes, with the aim of warning them away from the "mortal sins" that would send them straight to hell. The traumas caused by such psychological terrorism have been countless. Evidence of this instrument of torture is found in many paintings, illustrations and works of literature.

One of the most famous reconstructions of these terrorist sermons appears in the novel *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, by the Irish writer James Joyce. The protagonist, Stephen Daedalus, with his conscience "made filthy by sin", is terrified as he listens to a long sermon by one of his Jesuit professors. The following is a fragment from this sermon, similar to so many others that can still be heard in so many places coming from so many preachers:

Our earthly fire again, no matter how fierce or widespread it may be, is always of a limited extent: but the lake of fire in hell is boundless, shoreless and bottomless. It is on record that the devil himself, when asked the question by a certain soldier, was obliged to confess that if a whole mountain were thrown into the burning ocean of hell it would be burned up in an instant like a piece of wax. And this terrible fire will not afflict the bodies of the damned only from without but each lost soul will be a hell unto itself, the boundless fire raging in its very vitals. O, how terrible is the lot of those wretched beings! The blood seethes and boils in the veins, the brains are boiling in the skull, the heart in the breast glowing and bursting, the bowels a redhot mass of burning pulp, the tender eyes flaming like molten balls.

Among the innumerable works of art that depict this infernal torment there is one called simply "Hell", painted by the Jesuit priest Hernando de la Cruz (1592-1646), which is preserved in the church of the Society of Jesus in Quito, Ecuador. Thousands of children have paraded in front of the painting, brought there by their religion teachers, who thus inculcate in them the terror of imagining themselves condemned to such a frightful place.

The dogma of hell

Belief in hell, defined as a place of eternal punishment by means of fire, was declared a dogma of faith by the Lateran Council in 1123. The Council warned that anyone denying the doctrine would be subject to prison, torture and even death. Before the dogma was proclaimed there had been longstanding theological discussions about the existence of hell: some Church Fathers, like Gregory of Nazianzen and Gregory of Nyssa, were of the so-called "mercy" school: they held that the fire of hell was only symbolic and the duration of the punishment would not be eternal. Opposed to them were the "rigorists", led by Augustine of Hippo, who held that the fire was real and the punishment was eternal. After Paul of Tarsus, Augustine was the most influential Catholic theologian, and his influence has lasted to our own days.

The Lateran Council finally proclaimed belief in hell to be an obligatory dogma of faith. Two centuries later Pope Benedict XII (1334-1342) elaborated this dogma further in his Constitution "Benedictus Deus" (1336): *By the common ordinance of God, the souls of those who die in mortal sin descend to hell immediately after death; there they are tormented with infernal tortures.* In 1442 the Council of Florence declared that whoever voluntarily remained outside the Church would be condemned to that fearful, eternal fire. The present-day teaching about hell appears in the Catechism of the Catholic Church (numbers 1033-1037).

"He descended into hell"

The idea that a heaven or a hell – or even of a purgatory and a limbo – are concrete "places" is a tradition deeply rooted in the more traditional Christian theology. The Fourth Lateran Council (1215) defined another of these "places" as a doctrine of faith when it declared that after dying Jesus "descended into hell", a phrase that has become an integral part of the creed recited by Christians. The narrative of this descent into "hell" appears in one of the many apocryphal gospels, the "Gospel of Nicodemus", which was considered heretical during the first centuries of Christianity.

The "hell" to which Jesus might have descended was different from what most people think of as "hell". Rather, it was the place where the good people – those who had not died in a state of mortal sin – piled up, waiting for a "redeemer" to get them out of there, to "save" them. After dying, Jesus descended to that "hell" to rescue the "souls" of those who had died before him and were awaiting redemption – and to "take them up" to heaven with him three days later. That is the way it is explained in the Catechism of the Catholic Church (numbers 633-637), where we find the following text, taken from an old Holy Saturday homily: *The earth has shuddered and become calm because God has fallen asleep in the flesh and has gone to awaken those who had fallen asleep over centuries. … He goes to look for Adam, our first Father, the lost sheep. He wants to go to visit all those who dwell in the shadows and the darkness of death. He goes to free from their pains an enchained Adam and an Eve held captive with him.*

The real "hell" to which Jesus descended was the dungeon in the Antonia Tower, where he was taken to be cruelly tortured by the Roman soldiers before being condemned to death. That "hell" existed in his time, and it continues to exist even today in the form of concentration camps, gas chambers, clandestine prisons, and secret cells where some human beings torture, kill and "disappear" other human beings.

Limbo is closed and hell is reaffirmed

In October 2004 Pope John Paul II instructed Cardinal Ratzinger to create a commission of theologians to research the question of limbo to determine whether it exists. The group worked for three years, discussing and speculating on that absurd topic. Finally, in 2007 they announced the definitive shuttering of the gates of that other "place" in the great beyond.

Limbo was a place designed in medieval times to satisfy the "logic" of the doctrine of original sin: it was the place to which unbaptized children were consigned, since they were stained with original sin and so could not enter heaven, but neither were they to go to hell since they did not have the use of reason and so could not sin deliberately. The Catechism of Pius X (published in 1905 and used during almost all of the 20th century) declares that in limbo the children "do not enjoy the vision of God, but neither do they suffer". There is no mention of limbo in the new Catholic Catechism of 1992.

This theological invention for centuries caused enormous pain to mothers and fathers who saw their little children die, whether from hunger, curable illnesses, or any other cause, before they had a chance to give them the rite of baptism. Of course, the fear that their babies would end up in limbo and they would never ever see them again was a means for forcing families to get their children baptized quickly.

Demonstrated: hell exists, and it's eternal

The idea that there were several “places in the great beyond” was so absurd that in his desire to “modernize” these doctrines Pope John Paul II, on July 28th, 1999, declared that hell was a “state” or “situation” more than a place: *The images of the Bible should be correctly interpreted. Rather than a place, hell is the situation of one who freely and definitively separates himself from God. … Damnation continues to be a real possibility, but without special divine revelation we can never know which human beings, if any, have really been consigned there.*

Years later, however, in March 2007, Pope Benedict XVI, concerned about the relativism that might result from such doctrinal “modernization”, sought to reaffirm again the importance of believing in hell: *Jesus came to tell us that he wants us all to be in Paradise and that hell, of which little mention is made in our times, exists and is eternal for those who close their hearts to his love.*

Gospel: good news

In his book *Credo* Hans Kung, one of the most solid contemporary Catholic theologians, writes as follows: *Jesus of Nazareth did not preach on hell, even though he spoke of hell and shared the apocalyptic ideas of his contemporaries. At no time did Jesus show any special interest in hell. He spoke of it only indirectly and with fixed traditional expressions. In fact, some of the statements attributed to him might have been added to the gospels later. Jesus’ basic message was quite different. Without any doubt, it was a “gospel”, that is, “good news”, a joyful message, not a threatening one.*

In another of his books, *Eternal Life?*, Kung writes: *Unlimited psychophysical torture of his creatures, something so pitiless and depressing, so insensitive and cruel – would a God of love be able to contemplate that for all eternity, along with all the blessed in heaven? Does the infinite God really need such a thing to pay for a finite offense (sin, as an act of man, is a finite act!) or to reestablish his “honor”, as the defenders of the doctrine maintain? Is God such a merciless creditor? Is he not a God of mercy? How then can the dead be excluded from that mercy? Is he not a God of peace? How can he make discord and intransigence eternal? Is he not the God of grace and of love of one’s enemies? How then can he heartlessly wreak vengeance on his own enemies for all eternity? What would we think of a human being who satisfied his desire for vengeance with such hardheartedness and determination?*

What God is really like

With his words and his attitudes Jesus gave humanity the essential images needed to form an alternative idea of God, one opposed to the punishing, vindictive, intransigent God who dwells in the minds of so many of his official representatives when they preach on hell. He also used parables to help us understand what God is really like. The well-known story of the “prodigal son”, which might better be called the parable of “the good father” (Luke 15,11-31), is one of the most important in this regard. The father’s heartfelt affection for the son who abandoned him is the best image of the affection that God feels for all of us.

In the 17th century the Dutch artist Rembrandt painted “The return of the prodigal son” in an attempt to give visible form to those paternal feelings of affection. With surprising theological boldness the artist

painted the father's two hands as they embrace the son in a way that reflects both the masculine and the feminine dimensions of the heart of God, for one hand is large and rough, like a man's, while the other one is soft and delicate, like a woman's. How would it be possible for such a God to organize a torture chamber for so many of his prodigal sons and daughters?

Interview 45
DOES THE DEVIL EXIST?

RACHEL Friends of Emisoras Latinas, in our last interview Jesus Christ stated that hell does not exist and has never existed. Since then we have received hundreds of phone calls and e-mails, and our website is registering thousands of hits. Many people are astounded by these declarations. For example, I have here the message of a woman who is a faithful listener. She asks if hell doesn't exist, where does the devil live? Now, Jesus, I ask you that question – what's your answer?

JESUS I think that the answer falls by its own weight, like ripe figs. The devil lives nowhere.

RACHEL What do you mean, nowhere?

JESUS Hell doesn't exist, and neither does the devil.

RACHEL Hold on, wait a minute. I imagine that right now our listeners must be calling our lines, more dumbfounded than ever. I'm going to shut off my cell phones. Let's see now. You say that the devil doesn't exist either, but you often spoke of him.

JESUS Yes, that's true.

RACHEL So do you believe in the devil?

JESUS I used to believe in him.

RACHEL You used to believe in him? Could you please explain yourself a little better?

JESUS Like all my fellow Jews, I believed in the Devil. That's what they had taught us. I also thought the world was flat and that the sun revolved around it. Look at how mistaken we were!

RACHEL But you yourself were tempted by the Devil in the desert, and you even spoke with him! Or don't you remember? "Tell these stones to become bread." And you answered him. And then the Devil took you to the pinnacle of the temple, to have you throw yourself down from up there so that the angels would save you.

JESUS The pinnacle you're talking about is that one you see over there. Look at it.

RACHEL That one?

JESUS Yes. Do you see it?

RACHEL Our mobile unit continues to transmit from the Valley of Gehenna, and we actually can see the pinnacle of the temple from here. It is the highest point on the ancient walls of

Jerusalem, the place where the Devil took Jesus Christ so that he would throw himself down from there.

JESUS The fact is I never went up there, Rachel. Perhaps that was another invention of some gospel writer? Maybe it's one of those "comparisons"?

RACHEL You never went up to the pinnacle of the Temple?

JESUS No. Besides, I suffer from vertigo. I would have gotten dizzy and fallen easily.

RACHEL Let's get back to the devil. You say that he doesn't exist, but in the Bible he appears everywhere. They call him Satan, Lucifer, Beelzebub, the Fallen Angel, the Adversary, the Ancient Serpent, the Malignant One, the Prince of Darkness…

JESUS Yes, in the Bible and no doubt in other ancient books … I think that almost all peoples have believed in the evil spirit, the tempter. And do you know why?

RACHEL Because they felt his wicked presence in some way.

JESUS No. We believe in the devil because that way we can blame him for what we do ourselves. We say the devil tempted me and I couldn't resist; the devil got into me. In reality, the devil is *you* when you're doing something devilish. I think that each person has to be responsible for his or her deeds.

RACHEL We have a call… Hello?

MAN That guy talking there on your station is a charlatan, an impostor! He's possessed, possessed by the devil!

RACHEL Any reaction to this call, Jesus?

JESUS No, not really. They were saying the same thing about me in my time, that I had a demon. Let him be.

RACHEL There are more calls. Can we continue to talk about this topic which is so controversial?

JESUS Of course we can, but let's do it somewhere else, Rachel. It's so hot here in this valley [breath indicating discomfort] that I'm going to end up believing in hell again!

RACHEL Well, let's look for some shade far from here. Leaving behind the Valley of Gehenna, outside Jerusalem, this is Rachel Perez, Emisoras Latinas.

MUSIC

ANNOUNCER Another God is Possible. Exclusive interviews with Jesus Christ in his second coming to Earth. A production of María and José Ignacio López Vigil, with the support of the Syd Forum and Christian Aid.

INTERVIEW 45: BACKGROUND MATERIAL

Tempted by the devil

Three of the four gospels (Matthew 4,1-11; Mark 1,12-13; Luke 4,1-13) include the narrative of Jesus spending forty days in the desert, where he was tempted by the devil. The narrative is completely symbolic.

The people of Israel believed that the desert was territory cursed by God – for that reason its lands were sterile. In the desert only wild animals and demons could live. It was also a dangerous place, a place where human beings were tested and could succumb to temptation. For forty long years the Israelites had wandered through the desert, undergoing one test after another, until they reached the Promised Land. It is within this symbolic framework that we should understand the gospel narrative of Jesus' temptations. The religious culture and the literary style of the time when the gospels were written made it necessary for the narrative to include a Tempter, someone who personified temptation. The tests to which he submitted Jesus are likewise symbolic: all three reflect back on the history of the Hebrew people's journey through the desert (Deuteronomy 8,3; 6,16; 6,13). The people gave in to the three temptations of doubting God, accumulating wealth and feeling arrogant. Jesus rejected the temptations and remained faithful. In making this contrast, the evangelists wanted to show that in the personal history of Jesus the collective history of his people was being rescued and restored.

"The Devil exists"

The Bible is full of allusions to the Devil, and a variety of titles are ascribed to him. Like all his contemporaries, Jesus spoke of the devil and believed in his existence, but belief in the devil was by no means at the core of Jesus' message. It was simply a foil that provided a contrast for the good news that Jesus was preaching. The real essence of his message was that there is an all-good God in whom we can trust completely, and so overcoming fear constitutes the way of "salvation".

All peoples have believed, and most still believe, in the existence of the Devil, and in many cases they also believe that the Devil has an army of demons that do his bidding. In Christianity the existence of the Devil was established in the Fourth Lateran Council (1215), and it is a belief that both the Catholic and the Protestant churches maintain up to the present day. In 1974 Pope Paul VI stated: *The devil exists, not only as a symbol of evil, but as a physical reality.* The following year, in the face of growing theological currents that were putting this ancestral belief "in its place", the same Pope declared: *Anyone who refuses to recognizes the Devil's existence is outside the pale of biblical and church teaching, as is anyone who explains him as a pseudo-reality or as a fanciful conception personifying the unknown causes of our misfortunes.*

Another theology: the Devil is a myth

There are many Catholic and Protestant theologians who have with solid argumentation called the devil's existence into question. Among them is the German Catholic priest and university professor Herbert Hagg, a specialist in the Old Testament. Desirous of "building bridges between the Bible message and the people of today", he wrote one of the basic books on this topic, *The Devil: the Problem of his Existence* (in Spanish: Editorial Herder, 1978). In this book he concludes that the story of the "fallen angel" is a myth and promotes a theological vision in which guilt and fear are viewed from a different perspective, one that is more constructive and transformative. Haag also documents the horrendous historical fruits which "faith in the devil" has produced in the course of human history, and especially in the course of Christian history.

Satanic youth

Nowadays we often hear about groups of young people who are "dangerous" because they embrace "satanism". Youth gang members have "diabolical" images tattooed on their bodies, graffiti with references to the Devil appear on city walls, and musical groups produce "satanic" music. An example of this music is one of the songs of the Puerto Rican hip-hop/reggaeton group "Calle 13". When they launched their first disk in 2005, it was immediately popular with Latin American young people. One of their songs has a tango beat and the following refrain:

All the uncouth people / come to dance on volcanic lava / turn up the volume on the satanic music / we're going to burn in fire with the resident devil / the greatest exponent of sin … And the song concludes: *I feel a pain / deep inside my heart / if loving you is a sin / then I'll stay in hell / at your side / my poor child / we're going to burn together in hell.*

There are religious groups today which still sow the fear of hell in people as a mechanism for controlling consciences; they still present the Devil as a real, fearful, dangerous being. Of course, they reject this kind of music and warn people not to listen to it; they consider such music clear proof of the diabolical power that is abroad in our world today. Those who sow fear reap fear, but sometimes they also reap resistance. These cultural expressions reveal, perhaps unconsciously, signs of youthful rebellion and a decisive rejection of these deep-rooted ideas, which may be ancient but are not for that reason any less absurd and anti-Christian.

Interview 46
POSSESSED?

RACHEL This is Emisoras Latinas, with exclusive coverage of the second coming of Jesus Christ to earth. Today our microphones are located very near the El Aqsa mosque, with its beautiful golden dome.

JESUS In the old days the stables of the famous King Solomon used to be here.

RACHEL Well, let's continue our talk about that other famous king, the Prince of Darkness.

JESUS The prince of darkness!

RACHEL You laugh about the devil, but in the catechisms, the theology books, the churches' prayers, Lucifer always appears. You say he doesn't exist, but denying the devil's existence could earn you excommunication. Aren't you worried about that?

JESUS No, Rachel. I was excommunicated for contradicting many of the beliefs of my religion. The priests in my time threw me out of the synagogue.

RACHEL Jesus Christ excommunicated! That's an idea that will surely shock our audience, just like the one you proposed in our last interview, when you, Jesus Christ, dared to deny the existence of the devil. Do you still maintain that position?

JESUS Yes, I maintain it.

RACHEL One listener was so scandalized that he sent us this e-mail "How can he say that he doesn't exist, when he himself expelled demons?"

JESUS That's a very good question our friend asks.

RACHEL I checked the facts. Once, in Gerasa, you drove out of a man not one, but a whole legion of demons. There were so many that they entered into a herd of swine and then threw themselves off a cliff into the sea. Do you remember that?

JESUS Let me explain, Rachel. My people didn't know much about the causes of sickness, so they imagined that it might be the devil who was tying the tongue of a mute person or blocking the ears of a deaf person. And there were things that were even worse. When a man had a seizure and was foaming at the mouth, we used to think that the devil himself had entered into his body.

RACHEL An attack of epilepsy …

JESUS With mentally disturbed people, it was the same. We thought they were possessed by unclean spirits.

RACHEL And what did you do with them?

JESUS They used to remove them from their homes, tie them up, and hide them away someplace. I remember that poor guy in Gerasa. They had him bound in chains, living in a cemetery, naked, without food… If he wasn't crazy to begin with, they certainly drove him to madness.

RACHEL And what could you do for him?

JESUS Calm him down. Peter and James between them took the chains off him. I spoke with him. The only real demons around were his neighbors. They had him tied up like an animal.

RACHEL So, you didn't drive out any demons?

JESUS I couldn't drive out what hadn't entered.

RACHEL So are we to conclude that demons don't enter into people's bodies?

JESUS No, because they don't exist.

RACHEL And the herd of swine that threw itself into the sea?

JESUS That was something that the Gerasenes must have added to the story later. Besides being preposterous, they were very superstitious. But those are things of the past, because we didn't know much about medicine in those days.

RACHEL I don't think they're so much of the past, because practically every day a new movie is coming out about diabolic possessions. Did you see "The Exorcist"?

JESUS No, I missed it.

RACHEL It's a scary picture about a girl who's possessed by a demon.

JESUS There are many demons who take possession of girls, but they are demons of flesh and blood – those are the ones that really should burn in Gehenna.

RACHEL What about all those people who have seen the devil, what about the satanic cults and the exorcisms? In the Vatican there is a school for exorcists. Do you know that?

JESUS Those are Samaritans' tales.

RACHEL And so we can sleep in peace? There are no demons roaming about?

JESUS If God loves us as a mother loves her children, do you think he'd let wicked spirits roam about the world doing harm to people?

RACHEL Hold on a minute, we have a call … Yes, hello? … It's the same guy as the other day.

MAN Tell that false prophet you're interviewing that the devil's best trick is making us believe that he doesn't exist. Tell him that.

RACHEL What do you think of that opinion, Jesus?

JESUS I believe just the contrary. The best trick is making us believe that he does exist.

RACHEL Why do you say that?

JESUS Because the devil is a business.

RACHEL How do you mean, a business?

JESUS Yes, talking about the devil and preaching about the devil has always been a great business. But let's talk about that tomorrow, okay?

RACHEL You're the boss. You may not be the boss of the demons, but your are the boss of us journalists! This is Rachel Perez, Emisoras Latinas, Jerusalem.

MUSIC

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INTERVIEW 46: BACKGROUND MATERIAL

The demoniac of Gerasa

Gerasa was a city situated on the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee. It formed part of the "Decapolis", that is, the League of Ten Cities, a territory that was considered by the Jews to be Gentile country since its inhabitants practiced Greek customs. The narrative of the demoniac who was cured by Jesus appears in the three synoptic gospels (Matthew 8,28-34 and parallels). The story is based on an oral legend that was later made into a catechetical lesson.

"Possessed" people who were actually just sick

In the time of Jesus the causes of most sicknesses were unknown. There are many ailments that we now realize have a psychic or neurological origin; they include epilepsy, convulsions, madness, and various mental disorders, as well as some cases of deafness and muteness. In ancient times,

however, they were often thought to be caused by the presence of demons in the affected person's body; they were signs of diabolical possession. The "demoniacs" who are cured by Jesus in the gospels were certainly people suffering from such ailments. Besides their physical and psychological sufferings, they also had to put up with social discrimination, rejection by their compatriots and condemnation by the religious authorities.

The demoniacs of today

A great many films have contributed to the popularization of the topic of diabolic possession. Prime examples were Roman Polanski's "Rosemary's Baby" (1968) and Richard Donner's "The Prophecy" (1976), but the best known was William Friedkin's "The Exorcist" (1973). This was the most popular horror film of the 1970s, and all subsequent movies tried to emulate it and its sequels ("The Exorcist 2, 3, etc."). Such a flurry of films was bound to result in the appearance in many places of people claiming to be possessed and requiring the services of exorcists.

In response to all this mass media hype and in fidelity to official doctrine, the "Regina Apostolorum" Pontifical Academy of the Vatican has been offering since the beginning of the year 2000 a special course for priests who want to learn to wage war on the devil. After taking a course that prepares them in all aspects of Satanism (biblical, theological, historical and legal), the priests graduate from the academy as exorcists. Not surprisingly, the academy is under the direction of the Legionnaires of Christ – one of the most conservative of Catholic religious congregations, founded by Marcel Maciel, a pedophile priest. Moreover, some Catholic theological faculties that adhere closely to the official thinking of the Vatican, such as the University of Navarre in Spain, allow students to specialize in Demonology.

How to "expel" demons

According to the Roman Ritual of Pope Paul V (1614), which was in use for centuries, the three clear signs of diabolical possession in a person are the ability to speak in foreign languages, the ability to inform about secret events, and the ability to exercise superhuman physical force.

The Ritual explains that a possessed person may speak in a special tone of voice, may produce garbled speech, or may ridicule Latin, as it does everything "sacred". It also states that a possessed person often has access to secret information; for example, he or she may know when another person is committing a sin. As regards strength, the Ritual explains that the traits of possessed people are changed, and this is noted especially in their physical power or in a strange look in their eyes.

In 1999 the Vatican revised and updated the rite for exorcism. Now the exorcist begins with prayers, a blessing and a sprinkling of holy water. The formula for exorcising begins, "I order you, Satan," and the devil is denounced as "the prince of this world" and "the enemy of human salvation". The exorcism ends with the order, "Get out, Satan!"

An exorcist speaks

The Italian priest Gabriele Amorth is one of the world's best known exorcists. He is founder and honorary president of the International Association of Exorcists and is author of the book, *An Exorcist Tells his Story* (Ignatius, 1999). Amorth claims that there are four reasons why people fall "into the clutches of the devil": first, because such falling is for the person's benefit (this is the case of many saints, according to the expert); second, because one persists in sin; third, because one has been the victim of an evil spell deriving from a pact with the devil; and lastly, because one practices the occult arts.

Amorth explains that he cannot give precise figures regarding the number of possessed people that he has known and treated. He explains: *The cases of true diabolic possession that I attend to are numerous, but that's because I receive the most difficult cases, the ones that can't be resolved by other exorcists.* And he admits: *In the first years of my activity, when I accepted everybody who came to me, most of them were people with psychic ailments; there was no demon involved.*

Our demons

The word "demon" ("daimon" in Greek) literally means "broken off". A psychological understanding of "demons" views them as the shadow side of our own consciousness or what is known as the "neurotic component" of our personality, the hidden face of our psyche. If we reject or repress these "shadows", they will end up pursuing us, and we will imagine that some wicked Being external to us, a Demon or a Devil, is responsible for aspects of ourselves that are simply weaknesses, limitations, dark spots. When we act this way, we cease being genuinely responsible for our own actions.

We must learn to struggle with our own "demons". The more we deny them and reject them, the more power they will have over us. A Zen maestro says: *Become friends with your fury; it forms a part of you; it is your vital energy. Don't cut off your finger when it hurts.* The less we accept our shadows and the less we recognize them, the more we will project them onto other people: people of a different race or a different culture, homosexuals, immigrants, women…. In this way we "demonize" our fellow human beings: we make "others" responsible for what goes wrong and throw all the blame on them.

In these "demons", the one inside us, we can indeed believe. But we should not believe in supernatural devils or demons, who enter into our bodies and control our lives, who roam about the world seeking to do us harm. That is an unchristian belief, quite contrary to belief in the God that Jesus came to know and told us about.

Interview 47
DOES PURGATORY EXIST?

RACHEL Emisoras Latinas continues its transmission from a spot beside the ancient walls of Jerusalem, and we welcome again our special guest, Jesus Christ.

JESUS Peace be with you, Rachel.

RACHEL You have spoken to us about hell and demons, and you have categorically denied their existence.

JESUS That's right.

RACHEL Nevertheless, countless preachers have taught those things in countless sermons, and they keep on preaching that way.

JESUS It seems they believe more in the devil than in God, because they speak more about the devil than about God.

RACHEL In your last interview you were telling us that the devil has been a good business for some people. What did you mean by that exactly?

JESUS Well, by means of the devil they sow fear in people. And by means of fear they reap riches.

RACHEL But some people think that that fear serves to make people behave themselves.

JESUS No, fear serves only to make slaves of people.

RACHEL But wouldn't a little fear be a good thing? Maybe not hell, but … purgatory?

JESUS What's that about purgatory, Rachel?

RACHEL Purgatory, the place where they purify us with fire so that we enter clean into heaven. That *is* in the Bible, isn't it?

JESUS The Pharisees I knew invented a whole slew of purifications with water, but purification with fire is something they didn't think of. As far as I know, the scriptures don't say a work about that thing you're calling purgatory.

RACHEL And do you have anything to say about it?

JESUS Yes. God isn't cruel and doesn't put any of his children into a furnace. Behind those flames, I already told you, there has to be some profitable business.

RACHEL Well, let's ask Richard Dawkins, who's a specialist in gods and devils. Can you hear me okay, Dr. Dawkins?

DAWKINS Perfectly, Rachel Perez. Let me explain to you that purgatory was created by the church in the 13th century. Since they already had hell as a place of eternal torments, they invented purgatory to be an antechamber for transitory torments. The souls of the dead had to pass through there in order to enter into heaven.

RACHEL And how did they get out of there?

DAWKINS By paying.

RACHEL What do you mean, by paying?

DAWKINS So that the souls' stay in purgatory wouldn't be so long or so painful, the Popes began to sell "amnesties", that is, special dispensations of 100 days, or 500 days, or a thousand days. You could buy them and reduce the pains you suffered in purgatory.

RACHEL You mean the famous indulgences?

DAWKINS The very famous indulgences. A lucrative business indeed.

JESUS Didn't I tell you, Rachel?

DAWKINS Later on they began to sell them in advance. If you had big sins, you paid more and you could free yourself even from hell. If your sins weren't so great, you paid less and you were discounted days or months in purgatory. That way you speeded up your entry into heaven.

RACHEL Like someone who buys tickets for a football game.

DAWKINS Exactly. Three hundred years later, Pope Leo X organized the business even better and put a price on each sin. Any crime could be pardoned by paying something to the Vatican. Any crime child rape, incest, murder, even killing your own mother. There was no sin that couldn't be pardoned in exchange for money.

RACHEL Then the returns for the Vatican must have been enormous, right?

DAWKINS Incalculable. The fortune they collected helped to build St Peter's Basilica and the Vatican palaces, which dazzle the tourists that visit them nowadays. But the buying and selling of indulgences was the straw of corruption that broke the camel's back. That was what spurred Martin Luther to raise his voice, and out of his protests the Protestant churches were born. That was the reason why the church became divided.

RACHEL Many thanks for that information, Dr Richard Dawkins. What do you think of all this, Jesus?

JESUS What he describes is an abomination. To tell you the truth, Rachel, those merchants I drove out of the temple with whips were apprentices compared to these latter-day idolaters of the god Money.

RACHEL What more is there to say? From Jerusalem this is Rachel Perez reporting for Emisoras Latinas.

MUSIC

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INTERVIEW 47: BACKGROUND MATERIAL

The invention of purgatory

The Second Council of Lyon (1274) proclaimed the dogma of purgatory when it declared that all who died in God's grace *with true repentance for their sins, but without having made satisfaction for them with the true fruits of penance, are purified after death by the pains of purgatory.*

The word "purgatory" means "place for purifying"; it does not appear in any book of the Bible. That same Council also proclaimed the validity of prayers offered as payment to "free" souls from purgatory. The Council of Florence (1439) consolidated these principles, and the Council of Trent (1545-63) reaffirmed the doctrine of purgatory, thus countering the ideas of Luther, who at that time was leading the Protestant Reformation and preaching that such a doctrine negated the efficacy of Christ's death. Luther not only mounted theological opposition to the doctrine of purgatory, but also denounced the Vatican's juicy business of selling "indulgences" in the form of documents signed by the Pope, which served to "rescue" from purgatory the souls that were being consumed by its flames.

The indulgence business

In 1517 the German Dominican friar, Johann Tetzel, was traveling around Germany encouraging people to buy indulgences. The money he collected from the sale of these documents sealed by the Pope was destined to finance the construction of the ostentatious Basilica of Saint Peter in Rome, which until that time had been an ordinary church like so many others.

Tetzel's preaching, which terrified simple people with visions of the flames of hell and purgatory, infuriated the Augustinian friar and prestigious theologian, Martin Luther (1483-1546), who had previously visited Rome and been horrified at the way the trafficking in indulgences was carried on. He realized that God's "pardon" was being turned into a business and that as a result the need for true repentance was being neglected. When Tetzel was due to visit Wittenberg, Luther nailed on the door of the church a list of 95 propositions which demonstrated the falsity of the doctrine of purgatory and rejected the power of indulgences. Luther's defiance and his quite justified rebellion were the

spark that started the Protestant Reformation in Germany. Some of the 95 propositions are as follows:

It is a wrongful act, due to ignorance, when priests apply the canonical penalties to the dead in purgatory. When canonical penalties were changed and made to apply to purgatory, surely it would seem that tares were sown while the bishops were asleep.

There is no divine authority for preaching that the soul flies out of purgatory as soon as the money clinks in the bottom of the coffer. It is certainly possible that when the money clinks in the bottom of the coffer avarice and greed increase; but when the church offers intercession, all depends on the will of God.

Christians should be taught that anyone who sees a needy person and passes him by, even though he gives money for indulgences, gains no benefit from the pope's pardon, but only incurs the wrath of God.

Christians should be taught that the pope would be willing, as he ought if necessity should arise, to sell the church of St. Peter, and to give his own money also to many of those from whom the pardon-merchants conjure money.

Since the pope's income today is larger than that of the wealthiest of wealthy men, why does he not build this one church of St. Peter with his own money, rather than with the money of indigent believers?

Three years later Pope Leo X emitted a bull in which he condemned 41 of Luther's 95 theses as containing errors of heresy, scandal and falsehood; he claimed they were offensive to pious ears, bewildering for simple souls, and opposed to Catholic truth. The Pope claimed that the theses were the work of "a drunk German who will change his mind when he sobers up." But Luther did not change his mind. The Pope ordered Luther's writings to be burned in Rome, and in response Luther burned the papal bull in Wittenberg. A year later Pope Leo X excommunicated Luther. The movie "Luther" (2003), directed by Eric Till, recounts in suggestive and didactic fashion the history and the struggles of this reformer.

How much does it cost to pardon each sin?

"Taxa Camarae" is the name of a document promulgated by Pope Leo X in 1517, at the same time that Tetzel was preaching about purgatory in order to sell indulgences, and also at the same time that Luther was expressing his Christian rage at such an unholy business.

The "Taxa Camarae" includes a list of how much needed to be paid to the Pope to obtain pardon for the different types of sin. The list presented 35 cases of sins and the amount of money that was needed to wipe them out. In his book *Basic Lies of the Catholic Church*, the Spanish researcher Pepe Rodriguez translates for us this incredible, monstrous document. Here are some of the sins listed and the charges for them to be remitted:

The cleric who commits a carnal sin, whether with nuns or with his cousins, nieces or godchildren, or with any other woman, will be absolved by the payment of 67 pounds, 12 shillings.

If the cleric, besides the sin of fornication, should ask to be absolved of the sin against nature or the sin of bestiality, he should pay 219 pounds, 15 shillings; but if he only committed the sin against nature with boys or with beasts and not with a woman, he should pay 131 pounds, 15 shillings.

For every sin of lust committed by a lay person, the absolution will cost 27 pounds, 1 shilling; for incest 4 pounds will be added on in conscience.

The husband who maltreats his wife will pay to the chancery treasury 3 pounds, 4 shillings; if he kills her, he will pay 17 pounds, 15 shillings; and if he kills her to marry another, he will pay another 32 pounds, 9 shillings.

The absolution for the simple murder of a lay person is fixed at 15 pounds, 4 shillings, 3 pence. If the murderer has killed two or more persons on the same day, he will pay the same as if he has murdered only one. For the murder of a brother, a sister, a mother or a father, 17 pounds, 5 shillings will be paid.

Anyone who drowns his child will pay 17 pounds, 15 shillings; he will pay 2 pounds more for killing an unknown child; and if the mother and the father kill the child by mutual consent, they will pay 27 pounds, 1 shilling, for absolution.

The heretic who is converted will pay 269 pounds for his absolution. The child of a heretic burned or hanged or executed in some other way cannot be rehabilitated except by payment of 218 pounds, 16 shillings, 9 pence.

The trafficking of indulgences: origins of the Protestant Reformation

The 95 propositions of Luther, written in Latin, were quickly translated into German and were copied and published in many places. In two weeks they had spread through all of Germany, and in two months through all of Europe. This was one of the first times in history that the printing press, invented hardly a half-century before, played an important role in propagating an idea and mobilizing people. After intense debates about the contents of his propositions, Luther finally denied the Pope's authority in the church.

Just as nowadays there is much talk about the "trafficking of influence", as one of the many expressions of corruption in the institutions of government and public service, so the "trafficking of indulgences", the source of enormous corruption in the church for centuries, was what made Martin Luther confront the Pope and the Church of Rome and by his righteous Christian rebellion bring to birth the Protestant Reformation.

Purgatory and indulgences are still going strong

Even today the Catholic Church defends the doctrine of purgatory and therefore continues promoting indulgences as an effective tool for escaping its punishments. Now, however, the indulgences are

not obtained with money but by practicing devotions. The Church has established two types of indulgences, plenary and partial. Plenary indulgences “cleanse” a person from all traces of the sins he has committed and leave him ready to enter directly into heaven after death, without passing through purgatory.

People must fulfill a variety of conditions to obtain a plenary indulgence, including the following: adoring a consecrated host for half an hour, praying five successive mysteries of the rosary in a church or together with the family, reading or listening to any biblical text for half an hour, receiving a papal blessing by radio or television, attending a first communion ceremony, etc.

Partial indulgences pardon only a part of the pains of purgatory, in proportion to the importance of the devotion practiced. They are obtained by such acts as making the sign of the cross, praying for the Pope, wearing a crucifix, a medal or a scapular, depriving oneself of some delight, etc. The new Catholic Catechism states: *Every Catholic can gain both partial and plenary indulgences for himself, or apply them by way of intercession for the benefit of the dead.*

Richard Dawkins

Richard Dawkins is an outstanding scientist and an extraordinary exponent of science. He is also called “the most famous atheist in the world”. Since 1995 he has held the Charles Simonyi Chair for the Public Understanding of Science at Oxford University. He is the author of several books, the most basic and best known of which is *The Selfish Gene*. In his book *The God Delusion* (Bantam, 2006), Dawkins offers harsh criticism of several Catholic doctrines, including purgatory. For that reason he participates in the program.

Dawkins’s book states that the *Catholic Encyclopedia* offers “proofs” for the existence of purgatory and presents indisputable evidence for its existence with the following circular argument: *If dead people went straight to heaven or hell according to the sins they committed on earth, there would be no sense in praying for them. … And we do pray for them, don’t we? Therefore, purgatory must exist, because otherwise our prayers would make no sense!*

Interview 48
THE HOLY INQUISITION?

RACHEL Continuing our broadcast here in Jerusalem, we're still receiving protests from listeners and even some threats. Several fundamentalists have stated that if Jesus Christ keeps talking this way, they will take reprisals against our radio station.

JESUS And why are the hearts of these listeners so hard, Rachel?

RACHEL You experienced harsh intolerance against yourself. Intolerance and religion have gone hand in hand for a long time. As proof of that, I've brought along a little recording. I'd like you to listen to it to start off our program.

JESUS Yes, let me hear it.

NARRATOR They tied them by their hands and feet, and they stretched them until their bones broke. They made them sit on chairs with needle-sharp points sticking up, and they poured boiling water down their throats and in their ears …

INQUISITOR Confess, accursed witch, confess that you had carnal relations with the devil!

NARRATOR They drove awls into their bodies, they cut off their tongues and their breasts, they broke their hands, they raped them in front of their spouses and children… And afterwards they burned them at the stake.

JESUS That's enough. Why are you making me listen to something so outrageous?

RACHEL Because … because those torturers were your own representatives.

JESUS Mine? What are you talking about, Rachel?

RACHEL What you just heard is what was happening in the tribunals of the Holy Inquisition.

JESUS How can you call such a thing "holy"?

RACHEL That's what they called it, holy. I have the facts. Do you want to hear them?

JESUS Tell me, even if it hurts.

RACHEL Many scholars agree that the Inquisition was the most shameful page in the church's history. It was established one thousand years ago by Pope Innocent III for the purpose of pursuing heretics. He's the same Pope who imposed the "sacrament" of confession. The Popes who came later created the tribunals, authorized the most horrendous tortures, and approved the massive extermination of women in all the Christian lands, accusing them of being witches.

JESUS And who were those daughters of God that they were calling witches?

RACHEL Most of them were poor women, housewives, midwives, … There were also some very wise women, who knew much about the secrets of nature. People claimed that they were possessed, and they tortured them to drive the devil out of their bodies.

JESUS And the real devils were those same torturers…

RACHEL The chronicles recount that the accused woman never knew who was actually accusing her, or what they were accusing her of. If she denied the charges, the tortures were made crueler still. If out of fear she admitted to being possessed, she was done the favor of being strangled to death before being thrown into the fire. They also tortured and killed men, country folk, villagers… The families of the victims had to turn all their property over to the priests. And all that was done in your name, Jesus Christ!

JESUS Not in my name! Tell me, Rachel, how long was that abomination going on?

RACHEL It lasted for centuries.

JESUS And did many of God's daughters die at the hands of those devils?

RACHEL Some historians speak of hundreds of thousands, others of millions…

JESUS I'll tell you God's honest truth that was the hour of the power of darkness.

RACHEL Well, Pope John Paul II has already asked for pardon for the errors committed by the Inquisition.

JESUS Errors? Pardon for millions of women tortured and burned alive? That crime can't be erased, not even with fuller's lye.

RACHEL You mean you wouldn't pardon them yourself?

JESUS That needs to be ripped out by the roots.

RACHEL What needs to be ripped out?

JESUS The tree of faith in the devil. That tree has produced all the horrible, rotten fruit you've just told me about. It needs to be ripped out by the roots, completely. They need to state clearly that the devil never existed, and that they themselves were the real devils. Only then will they be forgiven.

RACHEL From Jerusalem, this is Rachel Perez, Emisoras Latinas.

MUSIC

ANNOUNCER Another God is Possible. Exclusive interviews with Jesus Christ in his second coming to Earth. A production of María and José Ignacio López Vigil, with the support of the Syd Forum and Christian Aid.

INTERVIEW 48: BACKGROUND MATERIAL

Investigating and punishing heresies

"Inquisition" means investigation. The Inquisition investigated, combated and punished heresies in the church. It lasted centuries and had different characteristics at different times and in different countries, although the common denominator was always intolerance and cruelty. The Inquisition began in the Middle Ages (1184) in Languedoc in southern France. Its original aim was to combat the heresy of the Cathars (from the Greek "katharoi", the "pure ones"), who were also called Albigensians; this was the first organized heresy to defy the Roman church in a specific region.

In the Lateran Council (1215), which was convoked and presided over by Pope Innocent III, the main topic of discussion was the problem of the heretics who at that time did not accept the official doctrines dictated by the Pope. The Council issued a decree against the heretics that began thus: *We excommunicate and censure every sort of heresy which militates against the holy, orthodox, catholic faith that we have just expounded. We condemn all heretics, by whatever name they are known, because even though they may appear different from one another in the light of day, they are all united in their clandestine activity; pride renders them all alike.*

In 1249 the Inquisition was set up in Aragon, Spain. With the unification of Aragon and Castille, the Spanish Inquisition was established in 1478, and it would last until 1821, always under the control of the Spanish monarchy. From Spain the Inquisition spread to the Spanish colonies in America. The Portuguese Inquisition lasted almost as long as the Spanish, from 1536 to 1821. The Roman Inquisition, directed by the papacy, lasted from 1542 to 1965, well into the 20th century.

Being a heretic meant being a traitor

After Christianity became the state religion in the 4th century with the "conversion" of the Roman emperor Constantine, heretics (that is, anyone dissenting from the official Christian doctrine, which in that century began to be the doctrine of the Popes) were considered traitors and enemies of the state: they were "political" criminals.

In the 12th century the Cathars (or Albigensians) called the institution of the papacy into question and disparaged its power. They said the Pope was "the Antichrist" and the church of Rome was "the whore of Babylon", thus evoking the image of the "great whore" in the Apocalypse. Condemning the opulence and the power of the Roman papacy, the Cathars were themselves very ascetical: they ate no meat and did not marry. They refused to use arms and rejected altars, saints, and devotion to images and relics.

Pope Lucius III (1181-85) decided to use military might to do away with the Cathars. He issued the bull “Ad Abolendam”, which required bishops to extirpate the heresy and gave them power to judge and condemn all heretics in their dioceses. This papal provision was the origin of the “Holy” Inquisition and the “Holy” Office. In this first stage the Inquisition was directly dependent on the bishops. In 1231 Pope Gregory IX established the pontifical Inquisition, which answered directly to the Pope and was administered by the Dominicans. In 1252 Pope Innocent IV authorized the use of torture to obtain the confessions of those accused.

Eradicating Jews and Protestants

The Spanish Inquisition functioned for more than 300 years. It was created in 1478 by a papal bull to combat the Judaizing practices of those Spanish Jews who were forced to become Christians. In the 15th and 16th centuries the Inquisition fought against Lutherans and witches, and in the 17th and 18th centuries against Masons and censured books. In 1559 the Roman Inquisition created the Index of Prohibited Books, a list of publications and authors that it was forbidden for Catholics to read, under pain of excommunication. For the books not totally forbidden by the Inquisition, the Index specified the chapters, pages or lines that should be censured (removed or blotted out).

For the Spanish Inquisition any girl over the age of twelve and any boy over the age of fourteen could be guilty of heresy. Heretics and persons who converted to Catholicism to avoid persecution were the principal objects of the inquiries and persecutions. The first Grand Inquisitor of Spain was the Dominican priest Tomás de Torquemada, confessor of Queen Isabel “the Catholic”, who presided over numerous inquisitorial processes and was responsible for the torching of Jewish and Arab libraries. The name “Torquemada” became part of the Spanish language, as an alias for intolerant fanatics. It is calculated that during Torquemada’s term of office more than ten thousands persons were burned to death, another 27 thousand were tortured, and some 114 thousand were sentenced for their “crimes”.

After the conquest of the Americas tribunals of the Inquisition were installed in Mexico City, Lima (Peru) and Cartagena (Colombia). The Lima tribunal had jurisdiction over Peru, Panama, Quito, Cuzco, Rio de la Plata, Tucuman, Concepcion and Santiago de Chile. The Mexico tribunal exercised jurisdiction over all of Central America. In 1573 the Lima tribunal issued its first solemn proclamation, accusing the Frenchman Mateo Salado of being a Lutheran and ordering that he be burned alive.

One verdict, dictated by a 16th century inquisitor against Mariana de Carvajal, resident of Mexico, reads as follows: *I sentence her to be beaten with a club until she dies a natural death, and then that she be burned in hot flames until her body is converted into ashes and there remains of her not the least memory.* This woman was condemned for her Judaizing tendencies. The sin of “sodomy” was one of the most fiercely persecuted by the tribunals of the Inquisition in Latin America.

The elimination of the Inquisition was a demand of all the protagonists of the Latin American independence struggles. The last person condemned to death by the Spanish Inquisition was a school teacher accused of being a deist. He was denounced because he did not take his students to mass and did not pray the Hail Mary in his school. He was hanged in 1826 in Valencia. His case had repercussion throughout Europe and finally put an end to that perverse institution in Spain.

The trials of the Inquisition

Whenever the inquisitors arrived in a town they would issue two edicts. The “edict of faith” obliged the inhabitants, under pain of excommunication, to denounce all heretics and their accomplices, while the “edict of grace” granted any heretics who were denounced a grace period of 15 to 30 days to confess their guilt without having their properties confiscated or being sentenced to death or to life in prison. This procedure provoked many people to inform on others, especially since they were protected by anonymity and the use of self-incrimination. The people denounced were never told of what they were being accused. The Holy Office made use of secret indictments in its trials to avoid reprisals, but these sowed great fear among the people and could turn any citizen into an informer and a collaborator of the tribunal.

The accused persons were imprisoned and remained incommunicado. Their properties were confiscated to finance the costs of the imprisonment and the trial. The trial itself consisted in a series of hearings in which the informers and the accused could be heard. The accused persons could have “defense” lawyers, but these did not really defend them; rather, they advised them to recognize their faults and confess their guilt. In order to obtain confessions, people were starved, tortured, or kept for long periods in prison. At first the church was opposed to torture, but in 1252 Pope Innocent IV authorized it, on the condition that the prisoners not be mutilated or killed by the torture. The tortures practiced by the tribunals of the Inquisition for centuries were indescribably cruel.

Only rarely did the trials end with the accused persons found innocent; most often they were found guilty. If they were found innocent, they were still fined and reprimanded, and they had to put one a distinctive robe so that everyone would know that they had passed through the tribunal. Those found guilty were executed. If they repented of their heresy and they were poor, they were hanged. Those of higher social state had their throats cut. If they did not repent they were burned alive. The executions took place during elaborate rituals called “autos de fé”, the first of which was held in Spain in 1845.

One case, one example, one horror

The exhaustive study of Henry Charles Lea, *History of the Inquisition in the Middle Ages,* tells of a case that occurred in Spain in the 16th century, after the Jews living in Spanish territory began to be persecuted.

A pregnant woman named Elvira del Campo was arrested by the Inquisition on the suspicion that she was Jewish. While in prison she gave birth to a baby boy. One year later she was taken before the tribunal of the Inquisition in Toledo. Two workers who were renting rooms in her house came forth as witnesses and said that Elvira did not eat pork and that on Saturdays she put on clean underwear. For having reported this conduct which made the woman suspect of practicing Judaism, the two witnesses were rewarded with three years of indulgences for their sins.

Under interrogation Elvira stated that she was Christian, and she said her husband and her father were as well. However, she said, her mother had Jewish ancestors. Elvira told the tribunal that she had not eaten pork since she was a little girl because it made her nauseous and that her mother had taught her to change her underwear every Saturday, a habit which she had never considered

religiously significant. The tribunal threatened to torture here if she did not confess to being a Jew. Since she refused to do so, she was stripped naked. Her hands were tied with cords until the bones were broken, and with her hands still tied she was then lashed onto a table with sharp edges. In the course of the torture she confessed to breaking laws, but since she could not give details about which laws she had broken, she was subjected to water torture: her nose was blocked, and liters of water were poured down her throat through a funnel. Once her stomach was swollen, they beat her on it. Many victims subjected to this kind of torture would burst open or die from drowning. But Elvira did not die. After four days the torture was suspended, and she was shut up in a cell, where she finally confessed to being a Jew and pled for clemency. The clemency consisted in her not being killed, but all her property was confiscated and she was sentenced to three years in jail. After six months she was set free – completely mad.

The Roman Inquisition

The Roman Inquisition, sometimes called the Congregation of the Holy Office, was created by Paul Paul III in 1542, in the wake of the Protestant Reformation, to examine the doctrinal errors that were spreading through Europe and to inflict severe punishment on their propagators.

In 1600 the Holy Office judged, condemned and burned alive the Renaissance philosopher Giordano Bruno for his novel ideas. In 1633 the scientific genius Galileo Galilei was tried and condemned for stating that the earth revolved around the sun, not the reverse. The Inquisition considered this theory to be contrary to the sacred scriptures. Fearful of being tortured, Galileo, who was then 70 years old, disavowed his theory and denied it before the Roman tribunal.

It was not until 1965 that Pope Paul VI reorganized the Holy Office and renamed it the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith.

An intolerant world

For centuries religious wars and the Inquisition smothered Europe with their intolerance and brutality. The Protestants also persecuted all the persons they considered heretics. In 1553 in Geneva a Calvinist tribunal, at the instigation of Calvin himself, burned at the stake Miguel Servet, the Spanish physician, theologian, and philosopher who discovered the circulation of the blood between the heart and the lungs. Contradicting both Catholics and Protestants, Servet denied the doctrine of original sin and the dogma of the Holy Trinity, and he rejected the baptism of children. Those who keep alive the memory of this humanist martyr say that *he always believed that everything that can be thought can also be spoken, discussed and done.*

In 1536, before England separated from Rome and the Anglican Church was born, the British linguist and Catholic priest William Tyndale was strangled and then burned at the stake in Belgium, with the complicity of the King of England, Henry VIII. He had been accused of heresy for translating the Bible into English, thus reducing the importance of the Vulgate version, which was the official Latin translation imposed by Rome. Tyndale's last words were these: *Lord, open the eyes of the King of England!* Just three years later, as a result of the Anglican schism, his translation of the Bible became official in all of England.

The “autos de fé”: pure spectacle

The “autos de fé” were among the most important public manifestations of the Inquisition’s power of intimidation. Both those acquitted and those condemned by the inquisitorial tribunals had to participate in these ceremonies, which sought to throw a solemn aura over the accused persons’ return to the fold or over their death, as the case might be. Held in public plazas and attended by huge crowds, the autos de fé were staged in a spectacular, dramatic fashion. The church hierarchs employed every possible device to instill fear in the spectators, respect for authority, morbid curiosity, repentance, repudiation of the heretics, and contempt for them.

The condemned persons would be taken at dawn from the prison of the Inquisition to the chapel of the Holy Office, and from there a procession would go forth, led by a green cross, symbol of the Inquisition. Those who had repented of their heresies went first, carrying lighted candles, and they were followed by Dominican friars, who for centuries were the ones in charge of the tribunals of the Inquisition. Next in the entourage came the persons condemned to death, wearing on their heads a paper cone painted with infernal symbols. Following these who were going to die at the stake or on the scaffold were the so-called “relatives of the Inquisition”, who are described in some texts as “the eyes and ears” of the Holy Office. The end of the procession was brought up by mounted lancers and the representatives of the religious communities that had houses in the city.

The greatest horror: the burning of witches

It was a world with little scientific knowledge about the causes of natural disasters and sicknesses. It was a world religiously dominated by a providentialist mentality, a magical mind frame and a way of thinking that was culturally modeled on masculine values. In such a world many women were thought to be witches, especially if they were “strange”. Women, whether very ugly or very pretty, whether very wise or very sick, whether very lonely or very free, were held responsible for catastrophes and evil spells. Sometimes accusing women of being witches was a way for their enemies to get rid of them and confiscate their property.

Belief in witchcraft and in witches was an expression of the rural folk culture of pre-modern times. In 1484 Pope Innocent VIII officially recognized the existence of witchcraft. In his bull “Summis desideratis affectibus” he stated: *It has been reported to us that a great many people of both sexes do not refrain from fornicating with demons, incubi, and succubi, and that by means of witchcraft, spells and incantations they smother, extinguish and destroy the fertility of women, the offspring of animals and the fruits of the earth.*

Once the Inquisition was created and its tribunals were functioning, these latter joined forces with the civil tribunals to search for witches and “hunt them down”. The persecution against them was especially brutal in Germany, Switzerland, the Netherlands, France and England. The period of greatest cruelty and slaughter was from 1560 to 1660. The German Dominicans Heinrich Kramer and Jakob Sprenger, appointed by Pope Innocent VIII to pursue and persecute witches, published in 1486 a horrifying book in which they described the torture methods that should be used to obtain the witches’ confessions. This book, called *Malleus Maleficarum* (“Hammer of Witches”), nourished the collective hysteria against witches that flourished throughout Europe for two centuries. Although it was officially forbidden by the church, dozens of editions of the book were printed in various

countries. In effect, this book led to a “considerable increase” in the number of witches, simply because many women ended up confessing due to the cruelty of the tortures to which they were submitted.

Nothing more than a mere suspicion was required to denounce a woman for being a witch and therefore for being in league with Satan. No concrete proof was needed, and the women had no opportunity to defend themselves. Confessions and accusations obtained by means of torture were considered valid. If the suspected woman did not confess after being tortured, this was interpreted as an even clearer sign that she was possessed by the devil. And what were the crimes of which the witches were accused? They included blaspheming against God, worshiping the Devil, offering the Devil one’s children before they were born, killing children to make magic potions with them, eating human flesh, profaning corpses, drinking blood, poisoning people, and having “carnal contact” with the Devil.

Using data obtained from the records of the Inquisition trials, a Wikipedia article provides some approximate calculations of how many women were executed during these witch hunts:

> in Switzerland 4 thousand (out of a population of one million),
> in Poland/Lithuania 10 thousand (out of 3½ million),
> in England an undetermined number (“thousands”),
> in Germany 25 thousand (out of 16 million),
> and in Denmark/Norway 1,350 (out of one million).

Some countries had fewer: Spain executed only 59 women as a result of the 125,000 trials recorded, Italy only 36, and Portugal only 4.

The last woman executed in Spain, in 1611, was the Catalonian teenager Magdalena Duer. The last woman executed in western Europe, in 1782, was the Swiss Anne Goldin. Most of the women executed as witches were from rural areas. It is estimated that one half of all who were tried were executed. Some men were also accused of witchcraft, but in much lower proportion.

The “reasons” for the burning of witches

It is obvious that behind the burning of witches lay the misogynist ideology of the church functionaries: they despised women and feared them. The book *Hammer of Witches* gives some of the “reasons” they put forward in their attempts to explain why women were so inclined to witchcraft.

Using biblical texts and classical Greek culture, the inquisitors held that women were accustomed to love or to hate in extreme fashion and so were impelled to commit grievous evils, making themselves accomplices of the greatest evildoer, Satan. Furthermore, women were by nature gullible, and the devil therefore “attacks them first of all”, as was demonstrated clearly in the temptation of Eve in the garden of Eden. Moreover, since women had naturally treacherous tongues, they were quite capable of justifying their acts of witchcraft with deceitful words. Finally, women were inferior to men, so that their faith was more fragile and vulnerable. For the inquisitors the Latin word “femina” – which we still use today – aptly described and characterized women, since it signifies “fides minor” [Spanish: “fe menor”], that is, they have “lesser faith”.

Right up till today

The Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, successor to the Holy Office, which in turn was fruit of the Inquisition, no longer sends heretics to be burned at the stake, but it does continue to condemn Catholic theologians, women and men from all over the world, by judging their ideas to be contrary to official doctrine. Using methods that are still medieval (secret sessions, anonymous denunciations, closed-door trials where the accusers are also judges, impossibility of appeal to an independent tribunal), the Congregation prohibits these "heretics" from teaching, condemns them to periods of silence, and censures their books. Among those who have been condemned in this way are the Swiss Hans Kung, the Sri Lankan Tissa Balasuriya, and the Brazilians Leonardo Boff and Ivone Gebara.

The fanatical intolerance manifested in the Inquisition was born of an excess of power and arrogance. In 1979 Pope John Paul II proposed to review the case of Galileo, certainly the most scandalous case prosecuted by the Roman Inquisition, but even so, the review never fully rehabilitated that great scientist. Furthermore, as late as 1990, the prefect of the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith, Joseph Ratzinger, later to be Pope Benedict XVI, stated: *In the epoch of Galileo the Church was much more faithful to reason than Galileo himself was. The trial of Galileo was reasonable and just.*

Years later, shortly before being elected Pope, Ratzinger appeared on a German television program called "Kontraste". When the interviewers dubbed him the "Grand Inquisitor", he answered: *That title is a historical term, but yes, in a way we give it some continuity. And according to our understanding of law, we still try today to do the same as what was done with the methods used then, which were to some extent wrong.* And Ratzinger actually justified that horrendous stage of ecclesiastical history by claiming that it had helped society to recognize the right of persons to be heard before being condemned: *Nevertheless, it must be said that the Inquisition constituted an advance: nobody could be judged without being investigated. That is to say, the investigation had to be carried out first.*

The fires were extinguished, but the arrogance continued.

Interview 49
DOES THE VIRGIN APPEAR?

RACHEL To lift up the spirits of our radio audience, perhaps a little disheartened by our last program, the mobile unit of Emisoras Latinas has decided to return to the peaceful city of Nazareth. And we'll begin today's interview with Jesus Christ with a good joke.

JESUS A joke?

RACHEL Yes. It's about your mother.

JESUS Let's hear it, Rachel.

RACHEL Well, it turns out that a priest arrives in heaven and sees a child crying. "Who is that?" he asks. "It's the Child Jesus," they tell him, and he asks, "And why is he crying so?" They explain to him "Because his mother Mary goes down to earth every day and leaves him alone; she doesn't have time to take care of him."

JESUS Either I'm still half asleep, … or I don't quite get your joke.

RACHEL Well, the joke is that your mother is constantly appearing on earth. In recent years her apparitions have been multiplying all around the world. There's really been an avalanche of them Lourdes, Fatima, Garabandal, Medjugorje, Cuapa, Ostina, Mandura, Arizona, the Mystical Rose – the list is endless.

JESUS Really?

RACHEL People claim that there are statues of Mary that weep tears, holy cards that bleed, silhouettes of Mary in trees and drains. Not long ago your mother even appeared in a piece of pizza.

JESUS And what does my mother do when she appears?

RACHEL She asks people to build her a church and to pray the rosary. One of the most renowned apparitions occurred in Fatima.

JESUS Tell me about it, because I haven't heard anything about this.

RACHEL On May 13th, 1917, in Fatima, Portugal, three children were tending sheep when they saw a woman in the sky. She was tall, blond, dressed in white.

JESUS Then I don't think it could have been my mother, because she was dark-complexioned, short, and always wore an earth-colored tunic. What language did this woman speak?

RACHEL Portuguese.

JESUS She was speaking Portuguese?

RACHEL A few months later the miracle of the sun occurred. It was a spectacle witnessed by 70 thousand people.

JESUS And what happened, Rachel? Tell me.

RACHEL At noon, after hours and hours of waiting, the three little shepherds saw your mother Mary pointing to the sun. Then the sun began to spin and spin around; it became blood red and hovered close over the crowd. People were screaming out of fright.

JESUS What a horrible thing.

RACHEL When the ball of fire was about to plummet upon the people, the miracle came to an end, and the sun returned to its normal place in the sky.

JESUS And why do you call such a frightening calamity a miracle?

RACHEL I don't. It was your own representatives in the Vatican who officially recognized it as a miracle meant to warn people. What is your own opinion about this, Jesus, since you are her son and also the one represented by the Vatican?

JESUS God makes the sun to shine on the good and the bad. On the smart and the dumb.

RACHEL I don't understand you.

JESUS There's only one sun in the sky, right, Rachel? The sun that those people saw that day was the same sun for the whole world. If the sun had come out of its orbit, all God's children would have noticed it. The miracle wasn't that those people in Fatima saw it, but that most people in the world didn't see anything.

RACHEL But what happened, then, in Fatima? So many people couldn't have been hallucinating at the same time.

JESUS Perhaps it was something they ate? Or maybe they were just faint after so many hours of waiting?

RACHEL You don't believe in the miracle of Fatima?

JESUS It reminds me of the stories my grandfather Joachim used to tell us at night to scare us.

RACHEL What about the other apparitions of your mother Mary?

JESUS My mother really doesn't need churches or rosaries. My mother doesn't play hide-and-seek. Forget that stuff, Rachel, and tell me some funnier jokes.

RACHEL Okay, but first we have to sign off from the program. We now take leave of our audience, which once more, it seems to me, must be wondering what we'll be hearing next from this fellow Jesus. From Nazareth this is Rachel Perez, special correspondent for Emisoras Latinas.

MUSIC

ANNOUNCER Another God is Possible. Exclusive interviews with Jesus Christ in his second coming to Earth. A production of María and José Ignacio López Vigil, with the support of the Syd Forum and Christian Aid.

INTERVIEW 49: BACKGROUND MATERIAL

An official belief

That Mary, the mother of Jesus, appears to persons on earth is a belief officially certified and actively disseminated by the Catholic Church. The very first apparition of Mary, according to official Catholic doctrine, seems to have involved the miracle of bilocation: Mary, while still alive, appeared in the year 39 to James, the apostle of Jesus, who according to tradition was at that time preaching the gospel in Zaragoza, Spain.

Since then there have been more than 500 apparitions recorded by the Catholic Church over 20 centuries, and the number keeps increasing. In the last two decades of the 20th century the Vatican received reports of 1,500 apparitions in more than 30 countries around the world. Only about 20 of the apparitions have been officially approved by the Pope or the corresponding bishop, including the most famous and popular ones, such as Guadalupe in Mexico, Lourdes in France, and Fatima in Portugal.

White, blonde and European

Curiously, practically all the "apparition" images which appear on holy cards, in paintings or in sculptures portray Mary as white, blonde, and in general European-looking. She frequently is wearing a blue and white robe, colors she never wore during her life since poor rural women in her time always had dark-colored tunics. Blue was worn only by the rich women of Jerusalem, who were the only ones able to buy the very expensive clothes dyed in that color.

In all her terrestrial incursions, the Mary who "appears" is always also an avid promoter of the official doctrines and devotions of the Catholic Church. She rarely or never mentions the novel and unsettling teachings of her son. Mary asks people to pray the rosary, tells them to go find a priest or a bishop, asks them to build her a church, urges them to make sacrifices for the salvation of the world, warns them about hell. In contrast, her son in his time raised questions about repetitive prayers, confronted the priests, avoided the temple, rejected sacrifices and never preached about hell.

Fatima and its three secrets

The “apparitions” of Mary in Fatima in 1917, occurring in the middle of the First World War and the same year as the Russian revolution, have been the ones most publicized by the Catholic Church. Mary “appeared” six times, once a month from May to October 1917, and she was seen by three shepherd children who were 10, 9 and 7 years of age: Francisco and Jacinta were brother and sister, and Lucy was their cousin.

Mary is supposed to have confided three secrets to them. The first was aimed at reinforcing a Catholic dogma that inspires fear: the little shepherds saw hell itself. *It was like a sea of fire, with demons and souls, crying out and groaning in desperation*, said the visionaries afterwards. The second secret sought to reaffirm the political prejudice of the Catholic Church against communism. In that “apparition” Mary told them that if Russia were to be consecrated to the Heart of Mary, *it would be converted and there would be peace; if not, it would spread its errors throughout the world, provoking wars and persecution of the Church.* The devotees of Fatima claim that John Paul II’s consecration of Russia in 1984 was the reason why the Soviet Union finally collapsed, seven years later.

In the year 2000, after eight decades of speculation, the third secret was “revealed” by Lucy, then an old woman. When the obscure message written by Lucy was finally opened, the Vatican interpreted its contents as relating to the 1981 assault on Pope John Paul II, which left him gravely wounded but not dead. The “secret” was simply a pledge that the suffering church would always prevail.

The day that the sun danced

During the sixth and final “apparition” of Mary at Fatima, in October 1917, the “miracle of the sun” occurred, an event that had been announced three months before. According to reports of that time, 70 thousand persons in Cova de Iría and thousands more within a radius of 40 miles gathered on a morning with torrential rainstorms. Suddenly they saw the rain stop and the sun appear; after spinning around three times, the sun came dizzyingly close to the earth and then returned to its original position. This “marvel” lasted ten minutes.

The Church officially recognized this phenomenon as a “miracle”. On that same date the director of the astronomical observatory in Lisbon declared to the reporters of the newspaper *O Sëculo: If it were a cosmic phenomenon, the astronomical observatories would have detected it with precision. That is exactly what is lacking: a clear indication of some disturbance in the system, no matter how small.*

Practically the whole of the official history of what occurred in Fatima that day and during all the “apparitions” is drawn from the personal memories of Lucy. Both Francisco and Jacinta died very young, shortly after these events. Lucy entered the convent as a teenager and there learned to read and write. Twenty years after the Fatima events she was told by the bishop of Leiría, José Alves Correia da Silva, to put her whole story in writing. By the end of 1935 she had her first memoir prepared, and she wrote five more in later years. Her writings are the only source for knowing what actually happened of Fatima.

A new message: abortion

In her more recent “apparitions” Mary has begun to speak about abortion, a topic that is an obsession with the Catholic hierarchy. Catholic websites give reports of countless visionaries who have received celestial anti-abortion messages.

In 1985 some visionaries of Oliveto, Italy, reported visions of aborted babies. In 1988 visionary Mike Siate of Texas stated: *On one occasion the Virgin came to us during the rosary, dressed all in white, like the snow. Then her beautiful white dress began to turn blood red. While we were kneeling in amazement, she explained to us that her dress became red because of the blood shed by her aborted children.*

In 1985 the Korean visionary Julia Kim claimed that she had experienced terrible pains, including the pangs of childbirth, because of aborted infants. She said that the “apparition” she saw revealed to her that *abortion and genetic experimentation are bringing judgment upon the world.* In 1992 the U.S. visionary John Downs heard Mary say: *My son, distribute my image so as to put an end to the sins of abortion. Satan is mounting opposition to this plan. My virginal womb is in pain because of the children ripped out of the womb of their mothers.*

To Nancy Fawlers, of Georgia, USA, the “apparition” gave a more specific message: *Human life, the immortal soul, begins at the moment of conception. The souls of the aborted babies go directly to heaven and sit on God’s throne. Pray for the mothers, ask that they experience repentance. Pray for those doctors so that they have a change of heart.*

These and other similar messages have given rise to a new devotion in the United States, one that is spreading to Latin America: people are praying the “rosary of the unborn”. Each bead of this rosary is shaped like a tear and has a fetus inserted into it.

Guadalupe and Juan Diego

Outstanding among the “apparitions” of Mary is one that took place in Latin America. In 1519 the Virgin of Guadalupe “appeared” to the Indian Juan Diego. This Mary was indeed of dark complexion and had indigenous features.

The “apparition” was studied in depth in 1980 by Jody Brant Smith and Philip Serna Callaghan, members of one of the many teams of NASA. Brant Smith had previously also done studies of the Shroud of Turin. These two Catholic professionals took photographs of the image of the Virgin, which is stamped on a piece of cloth, supposedly the cloak worn by Juan Diego on the day of the “apparition”. Those who pay devotion to Guadalupe claim that the image is a “photo” of Mary that was imprinted on the cloth; more stupendous still, the pupil of Mary's eye in that “photo” reveals in turn a “photo” of Juan Diego himself. Some people even hold that the image on the cloth maintains a constant bodily temperature, which has been measured by a thermometer. This would indicate that Mary herself remains alive within the cloth.

Everything related to this “apparition” has created much fanaticism in Mexico, even though it has never ceased to be a heated topic of debate. The critics not only question the apparitions, but also

wonder whether the Indian, Juan Diego, ever existed. A serious controversy arose among church figures in 1996 and is described in two books published in 2002 by the Editorial Plaza & Janes: *Juan Diego: The Eagle Who Speaks*, by Cardinal Norberto Rivera, and *The Search for Juan Diego*, by the priest Manuel Olimón Nolasco.

Apparitionism in the Catholic Church

The Mexican historian Rodrigo Martínez Baracs makes a statement that is applicable not only to the Guadalupe "apparition", but to all the others as well: *The basic question has to do with the way the Catholic Church relates to truth, to science, to the sense of what is true and real that we all share as human beings, apart from our creeds or political allegiances. In pursuing a narrow and ill-founded apparitionism, the Catholic Church closes in on itself; in seeking to grow and strengthen itself, it ends up separating itself from the other religions of our distressed human community.*

Catholic "apparitionism" receives constant reinforcement from many sectors. Behind each of the "apparitions" there are both ideological and financial interests. During his pontificate John Paul II actively supported the fraudulent "apparitions" of Medjugorje, in Herzegovina. As a result the place became "the financial nerve center of a multimillion dollar enterprise," according to the investigations of British writer David Yallop in his book *The Power and the Glory* (Carroll & Graf, 2007). In 2007 the Vatican became a business partner in Mistral Air, which flies pilgrims from Rome to the Marian sanctuaries of Lourdes (France), Fatima (Portugal), Guadalupe (Mexico) and Czestochowa (Poland). The airplanes are painted with the papal colors, white and yellow, and are staffed by people who animate the pilgrims with prayers and hymns during the trip.

Interview 50
UNTIL DEATH DO THEM PART?

RACHEL Emisoras Latinas again transmitting from Nazareth, covering the second coming of Jesus Christ to earth. His frank opinions are stirring up keen interest on the part of our audience. Every day new questions are reaching us, and they're for you to answer, Jesus. Are you ready?

JESUS Go ahead, Rachel. Whatever questions you want to ask, just ask them.

RACHEL Let's take this one. Several listeners want to know if your apostles were married or not.

JESUS As far as I recall, all of them were married. They all had wives and children. I'm not sure if any of them got married more than once. Men used to marry quite young in those days, and if they were widowed they'd marry again.

RACHEL And if they got divorced? No, clearly, they couldn't get divorced!

JESUS Clearly they could. In my time religious law allowed divorce.

RACHEL So it was you who changed that law and prohibited divorce? Wasn't it you who established marriage as something indissoluble and life-long? You stated "until death do them part."

JESUS What's that you say I said?

RACHEL "What God has joined together, let no one put asunder."

JESUS No, no, you're mistaken. What I said was "What God has joined together, let no *man* put asunder." I was not against divorce; I was against that thing you were talking about the other day, ma.., mach …

RACHEL Machismo?

JESUS Yes, that. In my time men were … they were an empire. They repudiated their wives for any reason at all. If the wife burned the lentils, if she went out of the house without permission, if she spoke with a neighbor, the husband would divorce her. And any woman who was repudiated and left on her own suffered tremendously. She could hardly earn a living, people avoided her. I wasn't against divorce – I was against machismo!

RACHEL So you would agree that if a couple has conflicts – serious conflicts, of course – they can get a divorce?

JESUS Yes, but the divorce can't be decided just by the whim of the husband.

RACHEL Nor by that of the wife…

JESUS Of course not. Between the two of them they should discuss things, and between the two of them they should decide the matter. If they see that they can't continue together, that they are no longer happy, then it's better that they separate.

RACHEL And after the divorce, would you allow them to marry again?

JESUS Why not? Life goes on. God is life.

RACHEL And the children? Isn't it terrible when children are left without a father or without a mother because they decide to get a divorce?

JESUS Yes, it's terrible, but I believe it would be worse if they were witnessing hate-filled arguments and conflicts in the home, don't you think?

RACHEL And … and a woman who was being beaten and maltreated, what should she do? Turn the other cheek? Pray that her husband changes? Just put up with it to save the marriage?

JESUS No, she should save herself. That woman should leave, get out of there, and never turn back.

RACHEL Let me tell you, Jesus Christ, I feel a great sense of relief. I'll tell you something very personal I had a husband, but he was unbearable, abusive. I had to get away from him. I believe that many of the women now listening to us will also feel relieved.

JESUS And they will understand what I'm saying. You can't imagine how hard it was for James and John and Andrew to understand all this. And Peter was the worst of all. His nickname was well chosen Rock! He was stubborn, fixed on his own ideas, a great male chauvinist.

RACHEL Could that be the reason why the Pope of Rome, who claims to be the heir of Peter's chair, is so harsh and close-minded with women? What do you think, friends of Emisoras Latinas, especially you women who are tuned in? Our telephone lines are open. We can also be found at www.emisoraslatinas.net. I am Rachel Perez, reporting from Nazareth.

MUSIC

ANNOUNCER Another God is Possible. Exclusive interviews with Jesus Christ in his second coming to Earth. A production of María and José Ignacio López Vigil, with the support of the Syd Forum and Christian Aid.

INTERVIEW 50: BACKGROUND MATERIAL

A very unequal marriage

The marriage laws and customs in Palestine in Jesus' time were very inequitable; they bore the male chauvinist stamp of a supremely patriarchal society. Until the age of twelve, girls were under the dominion of their fathers. From that age on they could married off, and generally the father determined with whom. Matrimony consisted in the formal transfer of the young woman from the father's power to the husband's. Once married, a woman had the right to be supported by her husband, but the rights of the husband were much greater. The wife was obliged to carry out all the domestic labors and to obey her husband with a submission that was tantamount to religious duty. Furthermore, the husband enjoyed two rights which completely skewed the relationship, so that conjugal equality was really non-existent: he enjoyed the right to have as many lovers as he wished, if he could maintain them, and also the right to demand a divorce, which depended exclusively on his will.

Grounds for divorce in Jesus' time

Divorce laws existed in Israel, and divorce was practiced there. The Law of Moses allowed men to dismiss their wives (Deuteronomy 24,1). However, since the separation was decided unilaterally by the husband, the situation in which women found themselves was quite unjust.

In Jesus' time there was debate about the legal justification of divorce: what grounds should there be for repudiating one's wife? There were two schools of thought about how to interpret the law. Some scholars held that only very serious reasons – principally adultery – could justify a man's divorcing his wife. Others claimed that trivial reasons sufficed: the woman had burned the food, or she was spending too much time in the street talking with the neighbors. The latter school influenced actual practice much more than the former. To make matters worse, since it was the husband who decided on the divorce, the woman needed the authorization of her ex-husband before she could remarry. The rejected woman often found herself in a state of total abandonment. She returned to society with her reputation debased and with scant possibility of surviving unless she became dependent on another man.

Not against divorce, but against machismo

The oft-quoted saying of Jesus, *What God has joined together, let no one put asunder* (Matthew 19,3-12), does not spell out an abstract principle about the indissolubility of marriage. "No one" should be understood as "no *man*". Jesus was very concretely condemning the customary, arbitrary male dominance of his time: "man" should not divide what God has joined together. This meant that the family should not be at the mercy of the whimsies of its male head, nor should the woman be left defenseless before her husband's intransigence. Jesus cut straight through the tangle of legal interpretations that existed in Israel about divorce, all of which favored the man, and returned to the origins: he reminded his listeners that in the beginning God made man and woman in his own image, equal in dignity, rights, and opportunities. Jesus was not pronouncing against divorce, but against machismo.

Indissoluble, … but still annullable

Interpreting this saying of Jesus in Matthew as a prohibition and condemnation of all divorce, the Catholic Church considers every marriage celebrated according to the Catholic rite to be "indissoluble". The Church's canon law code establishes that anyone who has been married by the Church and then divorced by civil law cannot remarry in a Catholic ceremony. Those who do remarry are considered to be living in sin and cannot receive communion at mass. In 2002 Pope John II insisted on this doctrine: *Those who consider indissolubility to be a simple ideal, and not a natural juridical norm, render meaningless the unequivocal declaration of Jesus Christ, who absolutely rejected divorce, because "it was not like that in the beginning."*

For the Vatican, nevertheless, indissoluble marriages are still annullable. The sentences of annulment are authorized by the Tribunal of the Rota in Rome, one of the oldest courts in the world; it is called the "Rota" ("round") because of the circular hall where it first began to function in the 14th century.

Annulment signifies that the marriage "never existed" juridically. Those who request an annulment put forward a variety of reasons: the marriage took place under duress, that is, due to force, fear, or "reverential deference to the parents"; the husband is impotent and the marriage "was never consummated"; one of the spouses is homosexual; the spouses belong to different religions; the wedding was performed without witnesses or before an unauthorized priest; the spouses' consent was insufficiently demonstrated; one of the spouses did not reveal that he or she did not want children; a wife who was not a virgin did not reveal that to a husband who would have married her only if she were, etc., etc. Recently the grounds of annulment have included the in-laws: the tribunal annuls marriages where the excessive dependence of one of the spouses on his or her mother is demonstrated. In reality, almost any reason suffices to obtain the annulment of a marriage.

The Holy See states that 85% of the "Rota cases" are free of charge, so long as the "indigence" of the involved parties can be verified. However, it is hard to believe that the case of an indigent person could ever reach that high tribunal. It is calculated that the average cost of an annulment is 2,500 euros for the lawyer, 260 euros for the prosecutor, plus other costs. The procedures last about two years. The principal objective of those seeking to annul a marriage is to be able to remarry in a Catholic ceremony, which is always an ostentatious and socially impressive affair. In the year 2006 the Roman Rota issued 172 definitive sentences regarding requests for marriage annulments: 96 allowed for annulment, and 76 denied it. As of February 2007 there were 1,679 cases awaiting sentences from this tribunal.

Interview 51
BECOMING LIKE CHILDREN?

RACHEL Here we are again in Nazareth, where Jesus Christ as a youth grew in strength, wisdom and grace, and where Emisoras Latinas continues to converse with him. Jesus, you were a child here. Tell us what life was like for children in your day.

JESUS What can I tell you, Rachel? We had to work even when we were very small. If you weren't tending sheep or goats, you were trampling grapes. We learned to sow and to mill grain …

RACHEL Today there are international conventions that speak of the Rights of Children. And in your time?

JESUS In my time there were no rights, just wrongs. Children were lumped in the same category with sick people, slaves and women. They came last in line. The only value of little kids was … that some day they would be big.

RACHEL And the little girls?

JESUS It was worse for them. The girls grew up, and … even then they had no value. Look at those two kids running there. Hey, youngsters, come over here!

GIRL Are you tourists?

JESUS She's a reporter.

BOY My father has a beard like you.

JESUS Would you like a hair from my beard? Let's see which one of you can yank it out!

RACHEL You're like a father with his children. You never had your own children? You never wanted to have them?

JESUS What tree doesn't want to leave its seeds, Rachel?

GIRL Hey you, what's your name?

JESUS Jesus.

GIRL And what's hers?

JESUS Rachel. And what's your name?

GIRL Samira.

JESUS And yours?

BOY William

JESUS Samira and William. Those names didn't exist in my time.

GIRL Do you know how to tell stories?

JESUS Stories? I know a thousand stories! I also know some riddles!

RACHEL Excuse me, Jesus Christ, but getting back to the question of your children….

GIRL His name isn't Jesus Christ, he's called Jesus.

MOTHER Hey, children! Where have you been? Samira, William! Come here and stop bothering those people.

CHILDREN He's going to tell us a story!

JESUS Go ahead, go with your mother. Come back later for the story.

RACHEL You get along well with children, don't you?

JESUS I always enjoyed talking with them. Once a girl like Samira explained to me when it is that the mountain goats give birth and where the hawks make their nests. The thing is, Rachel, children don't just learn, they also teach.

RACHEL We have a call coming in,… Hello?

PIRON I am Claude Piron, a psychologist. I've been listening to your program and I'm delighted with it. Two thousand years have passed, and I see that Jesus Christ is still the same, a revolutionary.

RACHEL Why do you say that, Monsieur Piron?

PIRON Because the idea that children are full citizens is a very recent idea in our culture. Until the 20th century, adults viewed children as little animals that they had to domesticate. It never even occurred to anybody that children are valuable in themselves. But of course it did occur to Jesus Christ.

RACHEL Thanks to our psychologist friend, Claude Piron, who just called. So, Jesus, from what I hear, you were ahead of your times.

JESUS Or maybe it's just that they were lagging behind!

RACHEL What do you mean, “they”?

JESUS The ones in our little group. I remember once when we were talking in Capernaum and some little children came along. James, John and Peter got upset “Get out of here, you’re bothering us. We’re talking about serious things here.”

RACHEL And what did you do?

JESUS I called the children over. “Stay here,” I told them. And I warned Peter and the others “The little ones will be the greatest in the Kingdom of God. And you guys, if you don’t become like children, will be left outside.”

RACHEL Well, look, here come those two again…

JESUS Samira and William…

RACHEL We’re going to sign off from the program, and you, Jesus, can tell them the story you promised them. From Nazareth, this is Rachel Perez for Emisoras Latinas.

MUSIC

ANNOUNCER Another God is Possible. Exclusive interviews with Jesus Christ in his second coming to Earth. A production of María and José Ignacio López Vigil, with the support of the Syd Forum and Christian Aid.

INTERVIEW 51: BACKGROUND MATERIAL

Minors

In Jesus’ time, children had no rights and were considered to be of little worth, but they had many responsibilities. And girls were valued even less than boys; they were said to be a “false treasure.” Sons and daughters were thought to be a blessing from God, but that blessing became real only when they “grew up”, which they did very soon, at 12 years of age. As regards religious rights and duties, the small value placed on children was demonstrated by their inclusion in a formula that was common in the writings of that epoch: “the deaf-and-dumb, the dull of mind, and those who are underage”. Children were also grouped along with old people, the sick, slaves, women, handicapped people, homosexuals and the blind.

The rights of boys and girls

The first statement of the rights of boys and girls was the “Geneva Declaration on the Rights of the Child”, framed by Eglantyne Jebb in 1924. In 1919 Jebb had founded the international organization Save the Children, which was dedicated to assisting and representing the millions of children in Europe who had become refugees or were displaced after the First World War. It was the first NGO to devote itself to the cause of children.

Jebb's pioneering text was approved by the League of Nations on December 26, 1924. In 1948 the United Nations approved the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which implicitly included the rights of children. In the following years there was a growing conviction that the specific needs of childhood needed to be enunciated and protected in a more explicit way.

In 1959 the General Assembly of the United Nations approved the "Declaration on the Rights of the Child", which contained ten principles. In 1989 the U.N. ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which has been adopted by all the countries of the world except the United States and Somalia. In 1991 the Committee for the Rights of the Child was created in the U.N. for the purpose of supervising the implementation of the Convention throughout the world. The Committee is made up of ten international human rights experts from different countries and different juridical systems. Their job is to review the periodical reports from governments on the situation of children's rights and to make recommendations to the governments on behalf of children everywhere. The Committee also launches its own initiatives. In 2002, for example, it promoted a global campaign to increase awareness of the harm caused by inflicting corporal punishment on children.

Ten principles, ten rights

The ten principles of the Rights of Boys and Girls, formulated in a way that children will understand, are as follows:

1. We have the right to enjoy our rights, without regard to the color of our skin, the language we speak, the religion we practice, the ideas we have, the country we were born in, or how much money our family has.

2. We have the right to enjoy the opportunity to fully develop our bodies and our minds and to grow up in freedom and with dignity.

3. From birth we have the right to a name and a nationality.

4. We have the right to good healthcare, good nutrition, a house to live in, and time to play.

5. If we suffer from some disability of body or mind, we have the right to special care.

6. We have the right to be loved and cared for, above all in our own family. We should also be cared for by the larger society and the government.

7. We have the right to an education that is not boring and that makes us learned, skilled, responsible, and useful to society. And such education should be free and obligatory at the basic levels.

8. In any disaster or conflict we have the right to be the first to receive aid and protection.

9. We have the right to be protected against all neglect, cruelty and abuse, and we should not be obliged to work if the work damages our health or hinders our development.

10. We have the right to be taught to be generous toward other people and to work for world peace.

Despite the declarations…

Despite all the declarations, conventions, principles, and codes of rights, the situation of children on this planet we all share continues to be a tremendous challenge. Using various sources of information gathered from all over the world, the Spanish journalist José Manuel Martín Medem has written a frightening book, *The War against Children* (Editorial El Viejo Topo, Barcelona 1998).

This dedicated journalist describes in his book the extreme violence that our world, which fancies itself to be civilized, inflicts on boys and girls in countless ways: sex industry, tribal wars, the trafficking of organs, sexual abuse in the home, slave labor, illegal adoptions, domestic servitude, sweatshops, etc. In this introduction the author states: *In this war the most lethal arms are directed against girls, who are the daughters of misery: they suffer not only the neglect experienced by all marginalized people, but also the discrimination and violence experienced by almost all women. The protection of children appears to be making some progress, and the declarations and the promises appear to have some effect, but the most helpful advice we can give to children continues to be the this: "Don't believe what they tell you, but what they do to you."*

Pioneer in a time when there were no rights

Just as Jesus had a truly revolutionary attitude toward women, his attitude toward children must have astonished the society of his time. He taught that the Kingdom of God was for "children" and for "those who become children". That means that the Kingdom belongs to those who are not taken into account by society. And it means that Jesus made children, precisely as children, the privileged citizens of the Kingdom of God, thus declaring that them to be closer to God than are adults. For Jesus children had value not for what they would be when they grew up, but for what they were as little ones. This attitude of Jesus has no precedent in the traditions of his ancestors.

Claude Piron is a Swiss psychotherapist and linguist, a university professor, and a specialist in intercultural themes. He participates in our program to highlight the novelty of Jesus' message and attitude regarding children. Piron's ideas about present-day childhood can be found in the article "We are responsible for the drama of the child-sun" at www.envio.org.ni.

What children teach us

There are many excellent films about how much boys and girls can teach adults. Jesus would love them, for they confirm his intuition that the Kingdom of God belongs to the little ones and that we can learn from them to be more human. We mention one of these films in particular, "The Color of Paradise" (2000), by the Iranian director Majid Majidi, in which a blind boy is also a child-teacher. Commenting on this film, the critic Julio Rodriguez Chico writes: *Upon seeing this and other Iranian films, so full of beauty and love of life, the viewer experiences a natural desire to cry out for these lives and these lands to be spared, to beg older people to learn from children to take a good look and not remain in the war-induced blindness that prevents them from seeing the color of paradise.*

Interview 52
PROSTITUTES FIRST?

RACHEL As the sun sets over Nazareth, the microphones of Emisoras Latinas are located on the outskirts of this city where Jesus Christ was born. None of this existed in your time, did it, Jesus?

JESUS No, all this was just bush.

RACHEL Now it's a populous Arab neighborhood with lots of movement. Liquor is prohibited, but it's still sold. Drugs are prohibited, but they circulate. This area is what we'd call the red light district, Mr. Christ.

JESUS What do they call it that?

RACHEL Let's say, it's a tolerance zone. Check out those young girls over there. If you were walking alone, without me at your side, they would already have approached you.

JESUS Are they prostitutes?

RACHEL Yes, prostitution is a social plague that never ends.

JESUS In my time it existed also.

RACHEL Well, they say it's the oldest profession in the world.

JESUS It'd be better to say the oldest "abuse" in the world.

PROSTITUTE Hey, you with the beard! Leave that skinny girl and come with me!

RACHEL See what I mean? Nowadays some people talk about them as sexual workers. They claim it's a job like any other that a woman might freely choose.

JESUS The ones I knew weren't free. They were poor, abandoned women who needed to buy food for their children. Others were held as slaves and unable to escape. Prostitution is one of the worst ignominies committed against God's daughters.

RACHEL In an earlier program you explained to us that the best known prostitute in history wasn't really a prostitute.

JESUS You're referring to Mary?

RACHEL Yes, Mary Magdalene. In the pictures and other images she always appears as the great sinner weeping at your feet

JESUS They talk that way about her because they didn't know her.

RACHEL Imagine, there was a radio drama called "A Certain Jesus", and even though the writers spoke very well of you, they presented her as a prostitute plying her trade on Jazmine Street.

JESUS Well, they were quite wrong if they wrote that.

RACHEL Now they regret it. They claim they didn't know. Anyway, returning to our topic… In your group … did any prostitutes belong?

JESUS Of course. Society looked on them as the last of the last, so they had no trouble understanding the good news. They joined our movement.

RACHEL Did you defend them?

JESUS I told people that the prostitutes would enter God's Kingdom before the priests did.

RACHEL Those are strong words. I can imagine there were strong reactions.

JESUS The thing is, the priests used to humiliate them terribly. They would spit when they went by and would avoid even letting the women's shadow fall on them. But those same men who condemned the women as impure during the day used to go looking for them at night. What hypocrites!

RACHEL We have a call… Yes, hello?

MONA Hello, this is Mona Sahlin. I'm calling from the Ministry of Equality in Sweden.

RACHEL It's a call from Sweden, Jesus. Yes, speak to me, madam minister.

MONA Rather, I'd like you to inform Jesus Christ that my government has decreed laws about prostitution. In my country the police arrest and punish not the prostitutes, but the clients.

RACHEL Very good. And do they put them in jail?

MONA Yes, because it's a crime. It's considered violence committed against women.

RACHEL What about the prostitutes?

MONA We offer them opportunities for work and rehabilitation if they want it. It hasn't been easy following this road, but we're doing our best.

RACHEL Many thanks to the Swedish Minister of Equality. You heard her, Jesus. Some things are getting better in this world, don't you think?

JESUS Yes, I think so, and it makes me happy, Rachel. It will be a long and narrow road, but it's the one that leads to life.

RACHEL And you, friends of Emisoras Latinas, what do you think? Are they ladies of the night, sexual workers, or victims of gender discrimination? Reporting from Nazareth, this is Rachel Perez.

MUSIC

ANNOUNCER Another God is Possible. Exclusive interviews with Jesus Christ in his second coming to Earth. A production of María and José Ignacio López Vigil, with the support of the Syd Forum and Christian Aid.

INTERVIEW 52: BACKGROUND MATERIAL

The first in the Kingdom

We understand a prostitute to be a woman who engages in sexual relations in exchange for money or other benefits; it's a commercial transaction. In Jesus' time there were prostitutes. And to be sure, there were also "pimps" who organized the business. Because of the prostitutes' low social status and the religious "impurity" associated with their "profession", these women were ostracized and despised by everybody. But not by Jesus, who spoke of them and held them up as models of openness to his liberating message. He claimed that they were the foremost citizens of God's Kingdom and would be the first to enter into it, even before the priests (Matthew 21,31). Jesus' words and his positive attitude toward the prostitutes caused great scandal among the religious figures of his time.

Mary Magdalene

Mary Magdalene was not a prostitute, even though she has traditionally been depicted as such in the history of Christianity. Nowadays we realize that most likely the gospel writers, all men, "made" her a prostitute in order to diminish and devalue the fundamental role that Jesus gave her in his movement and to belittle the protagonism she had in the first Christian communities. When the present authors wrote "A Certain Jesus", we did not know of the important research that was being done on Mary Magdalene's vital role in the early church. We also "made" her out to be a prostitute. And now, as Rachel tells Jesus, we repent of our error.

Is it not slavery?

The Cuban journalist Rosa Miriam Elizalde has investigated the reality of prostitution in Cuba. In her brilliant essay "Crime or punishment?" (July 2007) she offers important reflections on the reality of female prostitution as it exists in any part of the world. We share with our readers some of her ideas and reflections on the drama of prostitution. She writes:

"My body is not me," wrote a 24-year old prostitute, distinguishing between her "being" and her "soul" in order to defend herself, especially from her own chiding conscience. I had interviewed many prostitutes and pimps, but till that moment nobody had spoken to me so graphically of the drama of the human being who sells herself and thus submits her existence to a dualism, a schizophrenia that in practice divides her body in two. Nobody experiences with greater violence than the sexual slave the drama of being despoiled of one's most intimate self. "It's possible," one friend told me, "to sell your soul and keep your body untouched, but it is impossible to sell your body without damaging your soul." Prostitutes are in a position even more detrimental than that of persons who are subjected to the more usual form of slavery, that is, persons who alienate their labor power, but not their intimacy.

Understanding prostitution as a form of slavery leads us necessarily to recognize that such a practice is not an isolated tragedy. All acts of sexual violence, whatever they may be, are carefully interconnected with economic structures of domination which seek to disguise the sexual practice or render it invisible and which diffuse or confuse prejudices, according to the morality at work. Marginalized, humiliated, forgotten and left defenseless, prostitutes belong to one of the most tragic groups of modern life. Whatever the legislation in effect and whatever the attitude of authorities, prostitution is everywhere an activity denigrated by society and considered to be inimical to normal social life.

The oldest profession?

Elizalde further writes: *Almost all the myths [about prostitution] are based on an error that has been much publicized in recent times. One myth is that the oldest female profession in the world is sexual commerce. Such a description suggests that prostitution is an innate attribute of women and therefore quite inevitable. Nevertheless, this practice is unknown and has never been known in many societies considered "primitive". This is confirmed by archeology and by folk mythology, in which women usually appear practicing the noble professions: they are potters, artisans, charioteers, teachers, harvesters, and transporters. But this was ignored by historians during the long centuries of patriarchal dominance, and even today it is a subject that is treated too lightly, even in texts on sexual education.*

A profession, a choice?

Elizalde continues: *It's one thing to practice prostitution, responsibly or not, and it is quite another to choose it freely. When we say that a woman chooses prostitution, we assume that she does so with complete freedom, but this is another of the great myths used to camouflage the phenomenon. Prostitution is not a cause, but an effect. That is to say, the decision to satisfy personal goals by means of sexual commerce is preceded and predetermined by the woman's social, educational, economic, and familial circumstances. Understanding these factors is very important in conceiving strategies for achieving the social reintegration of prostitutes, so that we act against the evil instead of harming the victim further.*

Calling prostitutes "ladies of the night" or, even worse, "happy hookers" is one of the most scandalous lies that can be uttered on this planet. These phrases were no doubt coined by the clients: they are terms that appeal to the buyer, who can thus free himself from guilt when he makes his purchase. The life of prostitutes is neither easy nor happy, but sexist prejudices have such a hold on our

thinking that even the prostitutes make use of frivolous epithets that absolve the clients and the pimps of culpability. In reality, both clients and pimps are key factors in the chain of sexual exploitation, and both are socially dangerous because of their decisive role in institutionalizing the exploitation. There is a tendency for society to identify prostitution with the figure of the prostitute, its most visible and fragile face. The more sinister characters of this story don't usually emerge from the shadows, but the person who puts her body up for sale, who gambles with her dignity, even if she wouldn't admit it, is marked by a devastating experience and by the permanent torture of guilt.

Sweden: a law that shows the way

Inspired by these same ideas, which view prostitution with unconventional eyes (female eyes instead of male), Sweden has shown the world the way in the form of new law. Mona Sahlin, Swedish Minister of Equality and head of the Social Democratic Party, participates in our program to make known some of the provisions of this novel law.

In 1999, after years of research and studies, Sweden passed a Prostitution Law and integrated it into the country's sophisticated legal code for eradicating violence against women. The Swedish law penalizes the client and decriminalizes the prostitute; it penalizes the purchase of sexual services and decriminalizes the sale of those services; and it provides opportunities for the prostitute to leave the situation in which she finds herself. On the other hand, the law considers the client as much of a criminal as the pimp and prescribes that he be detained, fined, and put in prison for six months.

The rationale for the law reads thus: *In Sweden prostitution is considered to be an aspect of male violence against woman, girls and boys. … True gender equality will continue to be inaccessible as long as men buy, sell and exploit women, girls and boys by means of prostitution.*

The text of the law reads: *The idea that it is possible to buy a human being as one buys an object, to use as one pleases, is completely aberrant. This kind of sex has nothing to do with pleasure, but only with power.* The law considers and treats prostitutes as "victims of gender", and the government provides the possibilities of work, education, housing and psychological counseling to all who wish to leave their situation. It also dedicates public funds to educate and motivate public opinion toward a new understanding of the reality.

Sweden: a successful experiment

Excellent results have demonstrated the value of the Swedish law. In the first five years since its enactment, the number of prostitutes in the streets of Stockholm was reduced by two-thirds, and the number of clients by 80%. In other Swedish cities sexual commerce in the streets practically disappeared. The brothels, and the massage parlors that camouflaged them, also disappeared for the most part. There was also a decrease in the traffic of foreign women who were sent to Sweden for the purpose of prostitution. The Swedish government states that in recent years only 200 to 400 women and girls arrived in Sweden for that purpose; that is a small number compared with the 15,000 to 17,000 who arrived in neighboring Finland. According to opinion polls, 80% of the Swedish population supports the law.

The Swedish experiment is exceptional, but it is successful and exemplary. Finland and Norway want to follow along the same road. It has been shown that penalizing prostitution does not work, nor does the regulation or legalization of prostitution. A 2003 study from the University of London demonstrated that legalization or regulation always lead to a drastic increase in all facets of the sex industry and organized crime, to a dramatic increase in child prostitution and trafficking of girls and women for sexual purposes, and to an increase in violence against women.

Interview 53
ABORTION?

RACHEL Located today on one of the green hills surrounding Nazareth, we continue talking with Jesus Christ, who has been kind enough to grant us some exclusive interviews, in which he has made declarations that are capturing the keen interest of our listeners, especially the women.

JESUS It's the women who always keep their eyes open for the Kingdom of God, Rachel.

RACHEL I suppose you know that the authorities of the Christian churches, the ones that follow you, insist on condemning abortion and consign to hell all the women who interrupt their pregnancies. Would you like to talk with us about that today?

JESUS Yes, why not?

RACHEL While preparing for this interview, I was paging back and forth through the Bible, and I couldn't find anything that you said about abortion. Could you tell me on what page you speak about it?

JESUS It's not on any page. I never spoke about abortion.

RACHEL Never?

JESUS Never. So if anyone's looking for a statement of mine, they won't find it.

RACHEL But how is that you had nothing to say about such an important topic?

JESUS What was I to say about pregnancy and abortion? We men don't get pregnant. What do we know about such things?

RACHEL That's true, but…

JESUS In Nazareth it was the midwives who knew all about that. They helped the women when they were ready to give birth. And they also knew how to put an end to a bad pregnancy.

RACHEL And what would have been a bad pregnancy in those days?

JESUS Well, … the pregnancy of a woman who was sick and without strength. Or that of a poor woman who already had a large brood of kids. There were also girls who were made pregnant by abusive men. In the villages to the north the Roman solders often forced the women, even the girls. A good pregnancy was always a blessing from God, but when there was a bad pregnancy, people had to think about what to do.

RACHEL Did they ask the priest what they should do?

JESUS No. They didn't ask the priests, who lived in Jerusalem, or the rabbis, who lived much closer, near the synagogues. As I told you, we men didn't get mixed up in that business. How were we going to get involved if we knew little or nothing about such things? The midwives were the ones who decided.

RACHEL And how did they do it?

JESUS They used herbs. There were no medicines like the ones they tell me there are nowadays. Herbs were the remedies for all types of ailments. The midwives knew all about fennel, wild rue, absinthe… They knew the measures for each sickness. And by using herbs they produced abortions in the women. Those midwives were wise women. Some of them became part of our movement.

RACHEL I have to confess that I'm rather disconcerted … So abortion wasn't a sin?

JESUS Why would it be a sin, Rachel? The midwives used to pray to God when they attended the women in childbirth, and they praised God when the baby was born safe and sound. They also prayed to God when they helped bring a bad pregnancy to an end. And they thanked him if everything went well. They asked God to guide their hands. They were women of great faith.

RACHEL Do you hear the telephones ringing, Jesus? Everything you've been saying sounds extremely strange and even scandalous. Just listen to how many people are calling. This is sure to be a huge controversy. The telephones are ringing now, and they'll be ringing until our next interview. I remind our listeners that we are also transmitting by Internet, at www.emisoras.latinas.net. Should we continue to talk about abortion, Jesus?

JESUS Of course we should, Rachel. We'll continue talking about life.

MUSIC

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INTERVIEW 53: BACKGROUND MATERIAL

What the Bible says about abortion

The only mention of abortion in all the books of the Bible is one that refers only to a legal, juridical matter, not to morality. In the book of Exodus we read: *When men are fighting together and hurt a woman with child, so that there is a miscarriage, and yet no harm follows, the one who hurt her shall*

be fined, according as the woman's husband shall lay upon him; and he shall pay as the judges determine. If any harm follows, then you shall give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe (Exodus 21,22-25).

No book of the New Testament makes any mention of abortion, either in the words of Jesus or in the letters of Paul and the other apostles, which are otherwise full of detailed codes of conduct.

What Jesus said about abortion

Jesus gave no teaching about abortion. He didn't even mention it. It is quite significant that the same Jesus who resolutely denounced those who trampled on human life, those who spurned and excluded the sick, and those who condemned and rejected women, never spoke about abortion. The same Jesus who defended children, lepers, disabled people and others whose lives were at risk, had nothing to say about ending unfortunate pregnancies.

Using texts taken out of context as pretexts

Nothing in the abundant legislation that appears in the Old Testament books, nothing in the many declarations of the prophets, and nothing in the sayings of Jesus or the letters of the apostles to the first communities makes reference to interruption of pregnancy so as to condemn or punish such a practice. Despite such a complete lack of biblical condemnation, the Catholic Catechism and religious groups fiercely opposed to any interruption of pregnancy claim that it is a grave sin, and they justify their opposition using biblical texts which they interpret out of context and with crass literalism.

Some of the biblical texts they cite are Isaiah 49,1; Psalm 139,13-15; and Jeremiah 1,4-5. These three texts, like other similar ones, refer to the calling and destiny of some of Israel's great figures (King David and the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah). The texts speak of them as being called "before birth", "from the womb", and "from the entrails" of their mothers. The groups opposed to the interruption of pregnancy take these symbolic, metaphorical expressions and make them into a "scientific" principle, namely, that human life begins at "conception", at the very instant that the ovum and the sperm join together. Thus they conclude that even in the womb of his mother Jeremiah was already Jeremiah, and that Isaiah at the very moment of conception was already the person he was going to be later. They also cite out of context the equally symbolic text of Isaiah 66,9, which refers to the "birth" of the whole people of Israel.

When life begins to be human

When does a fetus begin to be human? The answer is given by science. What makes a fetus human is not that it feels, moves or breathes. Animals, and even plants, also feel, move and breathe. What makes us human is not our movement, our feeling or our breathing. And what makes a fetus human is not the human "shape" that it gradually acquires as it develops. When we see an echogram, the fetus appears to us to be a "miniature" person, but that is simply appearance. If we were to see the fetus of a little monkey, it would be very similar to that of a human.

What is proper and specific to human beings is in our brain, and more particularly in the grey matter of the brain, with its hundred billion neurons. Through the trillions and trillions of possible connections

among them, the neurons allow us to think, speak, know who we are, choose, plan, transform reality, dream, decide, create, and know that we are going to die. All this is what makes us human.

The regular and specific characteristics of the human brain do not appear in the fetus until about the thirtieth week of gestation, that is, at the beginning of the third trimester. An embryo and a fetus are human life in potency, in process, under way. They are seeds with the capacity of becoming trees, but they are not yet trees. Do we really have the obligation to transform every seed into a tree?

When human life begins to have a "soul"

Where science asks when life begins to be human, "religion" asks when God "infuses the soul" into the body of a human being. This question is answered differently in different religions and has also had a variety of answers in the course of the history of Christian theology.

First we need to understand what the "soul" is: how do we define it? For the Brazilian Catholic theologian Ivone Gebara, *the soul is the metaphor that seeks to express what is most profound in us. It is a metaphor that seeks to reveal our most beautiful desires and our personal hopes. The soul is the poetic way of speaking about our dreams, our utopias, our aspirations, our intimacy.*

We may also answer that the "soul" is what makes us human, or that the "soul" is rooted in the brain. There will never be a way to prove the exact moment when a human being "receives the soul" – because such a "moment" does not exist.

In the different religions, and even in Christianity, there have been wide-ranging opinions and tremendous debates on this matter. And the question remains open. For that reason people hold a variety of views about abortion, including Christians and other religious people.

In western Christian culture it was thought for a long while that the human body acquired a soul 40 days after being conceived. This idea was influenced by the symbolic importance that the number 40 has in the Bible. Some of the more misogynist theologians held that if the new being conceived was female, then the soul was not infused until after 80 days. Such calculations were not only ideological, but quite inaccurate: since the masculine semen was something observable, the role of the woman in procreation was considered totally "passive"; she was simply a recipient of the male sperm. The existence of the female ovum was not demonstrated scientifically until 1827.

Augustine of Hippo (4th century) and Thomas Aquinas (13th century), the two most influential theologians in the history of Catholic theology, speculated about this without much scientific knowledge. Augustine stated: *According to Christian law, abortion is not considered homicide in the early stage because a body lacking in sensation cannot be said to have a soul.* Thomas held the opinion that the soul was not received into the body at the first moment, but at some later point. He was one of those who set the "infusion of the soul" at 40 days for boys and at 80 days for girls. Thomas Aquinas considered a woman to be a "botched man".

When microscopes were developed in the 17th century, the ever misogynist theologians "demonstrated" that the soul resided in the sperm. Observing the sperms' movement and finding them to be shaped like "little men", they theorized that those little males, tiny but already endowed

with souls, were nourished by the menstrual blood of the mother. Later on they considered that there was a soul only after the fetus had a “human form”, or when the mother felt its movements. Some also thought that God infused the soul at the very moment of birth.

The advances of science has led many Christian theologians to believe that there is no “soul” as long as the fetus has not formed the gray cortex of its brain and as long as it has not reached the point where it is capable of surviving independently outside the mother’s womb. Some theologians propose that there should be no talk of “soul” until there are biological proofs of “cerebral life”, just as we presently understand death in terms of “cerebral death”, which occurs when the brain ceases to function, even though other organs of the body continue to function.

Only in the last century and a half or so – since the proclamation of the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception of Mary in 1854 – has the Vatican been imposing on the Catholic Church the idea that the soul exists from the very instant of conception, that is, from the moment when the ovum and the sperm fuse. This is often spoken of as “conception”, a term never used in science or gynecology. Several evangelical churches have also taken up this idea. In the historical Protestant churches, which defend the basic principle of freedom of conscience over dogmatic interpretation, there are much more flexible positions with regard to abortion.

An anti-abortion “saint”

As a part of the anti-abortion campaign that the Vatican has been waging all over the world, John Paul II in May 2004 proclaimed the Italian doctor Gianna Beretta Molla (1922-62) to be a “saint” of the Catholic Church. The heroic act that earned her this honor was choosing to give birth instead of caring for her own health and her own life.

Gianna Beretta had a husband and three children. In the second month of her fourth pregnancy there was discovered near her uterus a cancerous fibroma that threatened her own health and that of the fetus. Her doctor told her that in order to save her life she would have to interrupt the pregnancy. There were three alternatives: 1) a total laparotomy, which would remove the fibroma and the uterus; this would have saved her life and stopped the development of the fetus; 2) interruption of the pregnancy and removal of the fibroma, which would allow her to have more children; and 3) removal of the fibroma only, without interrupting the pregnancy. In order not to interrupt the pregnancy, in order not to “sin”, Gianna chose the third option, the most dangerous for her and the most ominous for her future.

She was operated on and the pregnancy continued. Seven days after giving birth to her fourth child, she died of cancer, just as the doctors told her she would. She left behind a widowed husband and four children. Upon learning of her death, Pope Paul VI lauded her decision and called it “premeditated immolation”. Pope John II, in canonizing her, proposed her to Catholic women and wives as a model and example of *the pure, chaste and fecund beauty of conjugal love lived as a response to the divine call.*

What do the non-Christian religions say about abortion?

All religions have reflected on abortion and have commandments about the interruption of pregnancy, because all religions seek after the meaning of life and lay down norms for what should be done to respect, develop and preserve life. All religions understand that life is sacred; it is a gift of God, or of the gods.

In Judaism the most orthodox are opposed to abortion, but they accept it whenever the life or the health of the mother is in danger. In all the currents of Judaism the mother always has priority over the fetus, which is not considered a full person endowed with rights until the moment that it is born. Most often the decision about abortion is left in the hands of the woman, in consultation with the rabbi.

Islam has several different currents, which range from strict prohibition of abortion to unconditional freedom with regard to it. The most commonly accepted idea is that the fetus begins to have a "soul" about 120 days after gestation; therefore abortion is generally permitted within that time. The mother's health and life are always given priority, even in the strictest currents.

Hinduism considers human life to be in perpetual evolution, and it always gives priority to the life and health of the woman. It has very broad views regarding the interruption of pregnancy.

The different schools of Buddhism hold that respect for life, all life, and rejection of all violence is essential. They also teach that the intention with which a person acts and the self-knowledge of the person acting are also essential. Given these perspectives, there is great flexibility regarding the decision to abort, and consideration is given to the quite variable circumstances of a person's decision.

The greatest severity

The official Catholic positions regarding abortion turn out to be the most rigid ones that exist. The Vatican not only opposes abortion, but it is condemns most forms of birth control. It therefore heads women down a dead-end street. Even though it is known that family planning, with its very anti-conceptive methods, is the best way to prevent abortions since it avoids unwanted pregnancies, the Vatican doctrine is opposed to any birth control that uses "artificial" methods and accepts only the "rhythm" method, which is often complicated and ineffective. The Vatican even condemns the use of the condom and the "morning-after" pill.

The message implicit in all these prohibitions, as well as in the Church's suspicions and reluctance regarding good sexual education in the schools, is that the true destiny of women is to accept "all the children that God sends them". None of the other religions shares the Catholic ideas of the Vatican about birth control. Practically all of them allow and even support the artificial methods of birth control, claiming that they are not contrary to their religious beliefs.

Why such severity?

It is not easy to understand the deeper reasons for the severe and intolerant insistence with which some clergy oppose all abortion under any circumstance. Aside from the traditional ecclesiastical misogyny and the general desire to control female sexuality and limit women's freedom of

conscience, the German theologian Eugen Drewermann, a psychoanalyst by profession, points to one of the more obscure or hidden reasons that might explain the severity of the Church's position:

In a psychoanalytic perspective, [the reasoning] is all perfectly motivated – from the strict rigor of prohibiting the "murder of a child in its mother's womb" to the amazing and theoretically incomprehensible comparison by which Cardinal Josef Hoffner (in 1986) placed abortion on the same plane with the mass extermination of so many "useless lives" in the gas chambers of the Nazi regime. To understand such motivation, it suffices to presuppose that the defenders of this position had an early childhood experience that is transformed, when they reach maturity, into overwhelming evidence that, if they are in fact alive, this is due only the heroic, sacrificial will of their own mothers. Consequently, the person who discovers such evidence is expected, like another Abel, to assume his own personal readiness for sacrifice. Thus, when they are made priests of a demanding God, they become capable of demanding of everybody, especially of mothers and other women, that they act in the same way and "freely" offer their personal sacrifice.

Other more sensible and more compassionate voices

Many pastors, priests, religious and even bishops are questioning and contradicting the Vatican positions regarding abortion. For example, Cardinal Paulo Evaristo Arns, who for many years was archbishop of Sao Paolo, Brazil, expressed the following: *The counsel we should give any woman who has been raped is: go immediately to the gynecologist and receive the treatment. Don't wait for the child to be formed in your womb. This is the counsel I received from my morals professor fifty years ago.*

And the opinion of Ivone Gebara, Brazilian theologian and nun, is this: *A woman is not obliged to abort or not to abort, but she should have the right to decide. An inequitable society denies that right to poor women, starting from the moment when they are denied the right to a good sexual education. If a 15-year old girl says that she cannot proceed with her pregnancy, society does not have the right to consider her culpable, because society's responsibility toward her before she got pregnant was not fulfilled. I am therefore in favor of decriminalizing abortion, but also of giving young people a good sexual education. I believe that governments should not criminalize abortion. They should provide for women who freely decide to abort the conditions for doing so as quickly as possible.*

For a better understanding of abortion from the perspective of two eminent Christian gynecologists, we recommend the enlightening book *The Human Drama of Abortion: A Global Search for Consensus,* by Aníbal Faúndes and José Barzelatto (Vanderbilt University Press, 2006). The Chilean writer Isabel Allende speaks of abortion thus: *Abortion is a problem that affects almost everybody, directly or indirectly, at least once in the course of their lives. It is a desperate solution that pleases nobody and always leaves emotional and physical scars.*

Interview 54
MALE ABORTION?

RACHEL Here in Nazareth we resume our interview with Jesus Christ on the delicate subject of abortion. Jesus, let's go straight to some concrete questions. Let's begin by defining your position are you actually in favor of abortion?

JESUS I am in favor of life.

RACHEL I mean, if you would accept that in some cases….

JESUS Rachel, God has given us two treasures life and liberty. We are free to decide our lives.

RACHEL But always respecting God's laws, which tell us not to kill.

JESUS Would any woman want to eliminate the fruit of her womb? Would any woman be happy about aborting? I think that if a woman decides to do so, there must be a very serious reason.

RACHEL So serious as to justify eliminating a life?

JESUS Listen, Rachel. God wants us to have not only life, but life in all its fullness.

RACHEL Could you explain yourself a little better?

JESUS The thing is, being alive is not just a matter of coming into this world and breathing air. Being alive means growing up in a family that loves you. Being alive means having good nourishment, staying healthy, getting an education.

RACHEL That life in all its fullness that you speak about is what today we call quality of life.

JESUS Just that, Rachel. But tell me, what life awaits a child born of frustration and disappointment? What happens to the children who are left orphans if their mother dies in childbirth? And is it just to make a girl who has been raped bring the fruit of that violence into the world? When King David took advantage of Bethsheba, God did not allow the child of that crime to be born.

RACHEL Well, some priests teach that a woman must bring into the world all the children that God sends her.

JESUS But the question is do those children come from God or from the urges of some wretched man?

RACHEL Wherever they come from, those priests insist that the woman has the obligation to give birth to them.

JESUS Sure, since they're not the ones who get pregnant, they can speak without compassion. They speak of what they know nothing about.

RACHEL So a woman who for serious reasons decides to abort is not condemned and excommunicated?

JESUS Believe me, Rachel, God will not judge her. And you know why? Because God is a mother. Do you know any mother who does not sympathize with another mother caught in such a difficult situation?

RACHEL But I insist when you say that, are you not discarding the fifth commandment, which commands us not to kill?

JESUS Cutting down a tree is not the same thing as not watering a seed. God does not command us to convert every seed into a tree.

RACHEL Well, in some countries women who abort are still penalized they go to jail and are accused of murder.

JESUS They're hypocrites, because they're the same ones who kill people when they make wars and when they oppress the poor. If they are such great defenders of life, why don't they punish men when they abort?

RACHEL Are you referring to the doctors who perform abortions?

JESUS I'm referring to the men who do not take care of life. In my time, in all times, there have been countless women, as many as the grains of sand on the seashores, who have found themselves obliged to bring up their children alone, without the help of any man. Where were the fathers of those kids? They begot children and then gave them neither name nor sustenance.

RACHEL Paternal irresponsibility…

JESUS I tell you the truth, Rachel, the man who gets a woman pregnant and abandons her is committing abortion. The men who force themselves on women, those who forget about their own children – those are the ones who offend God; those are the ones who abort. I did not speak about that in my time. I speak about that now, since you give me the opportunity.

RACHEL Male abortion. That's the other side of the coin of this controversial topic. How many women decide to interrupt their pregnancies because of men? Male abortion a new concept, an ethical challenge. For Emisoras Latinas, Rachel Perez, Nazareth.

MUSIC

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INTERVIEW 54: BACKGROUND MATERIAL

A dilemma between life and life

In dealing with the dilemma of abortion, attempts are made to divide people into two camps: those who are pro-life and those who are pro-abortion. The pro-life people claim that all abortion is criminal and that aborting is killing. They try to make others believe that there are groups of women, feminists, who propagate a "culture of death" and so promote the massive, and even festive, practice of abortion. By framing the dilemma as one between life and death, they make women feel guilty and terrified. However, there is always a dilemma for any woman confronted with a pregnancy that is unwanted, risky, or of uncertain outcome, but that dilemma is between life and life.

What life awaits a child who is born with a congenital infirmity? What about the parents who already have many children and don't have the wherewithal to give a new baby even the most basic care? What are the risks to the life of a pregnant woman who has a chronic illness or other health problems? What emotional crisis does an unforeseen and unwanted pregnancy cause for a woman, and what does that mean for the rest of her life? What lifetime opportunities – studies, work, relationships – become truncated for an adolescent who becomes pregnant? What is the violent or abusive origin of the life that is budding in the womb of that girl or young woman? What effect will that violent origin have on the future of that new life?

Should a woman who suffers from a grave illness and gets pregnant die in order "not to kill", when an operation in which the fetus is lost would cure her? Should she leave her other children orphans? Is it "killing" not to give life to a fetus with an incurable disease that it would cause it to suffer painfully all its days? Is it "killing" not to give life to a fetus with a serious brain deformity, in a poor family unable to care for it, where that child would be an unbearable burden for its parents and siblings? Is it "killing" not to give life to a fetus with an untreatable infirmity if its father and mother are fearful of the grievous, lasting effects that the ailment would have on their own lives?

Is it "killing" not to give life to the fruit of violence and rape, to something rejected even as it lies in its mother's womb? Is it "killing" not to give life to the fruit of the rape of a girl? All these questions show that the dilemma is truly between life and life. Each case is different and requires a different kind of reflection. And in each case there should be the freedom to decide responsibly about life.

Two gifts: life and the freedom to decide about life

In the dilemma concerning abortion, what is truly at stake is life and freedom, and the ideas we have about them. Even though we readily agree that life is "a gift of God", certain "providentialist" ideas about God prevent us from realizing that God has also given us another gift: the gift of freedom, so that we can decide responsibly about our lives and about life.

Since the dilemma is always between life and life and since life and freedom are always at stake, each case of an unwanted pregnancy and each decision about whether to interrupt it is inevitably surrounded by vital questions and difficult answers. The most Christian way to proceed is to respect the answers that each woman conscientiously and responsibly gives in her own case. No woman, even when she defends the interruption of her pregnancy, should be judged or condemned or labeled pro-abortion.

Without judging, with compassion

Just as the Bible in its entirety was written by men, so also the doctrines of the Christian churches have always been proposed and formulated by men. Given this reality, we are justified in being "suspicious" about the theological criteria which judge abortion to be a crime and which blame and condemn women who for the sake of their lives or their health interrupt their unwanted or risky pregnancies. Since in Christian churches it is the men – priests and ministers – who have always been in charge and decided everything, the ideas they have disseminated about sexuality, maternity and childbirth have always been male chauvinist.

For this reason women's views have been ignored, even though it is women who should be most taken into account and valued when there is a question of deciding to interrupt a pregnancy. The important thing is to help the woman to reflect and decide. Ideally such reflection and decision would be shared by the man who begot the new life, but frequently that does not happen. Helping her to reflect and decide – that's what Jesus would do. He would not judge her, and he would never condemn her, whatever decision she took.

If these walls could speak…

A number of films treat the topic of abortion and facilitate debate about this controversial yet vital topic We will highlight three of them. "If These Walls Could Talk" (U.S.A., 1996), from directors Cher and Nancy Sacova, narrates the story of three women from different social backgrounds who find themselves in the need to abort in the years 1952, 1974 and 1996 in the United States.

"The Secret of Vera Drake" (France-U.K., 2006) is set in London in 1950, when England still prohibited abortion. The film tells the story of Vera, who for twenty years practiced abortions in a very natural way ("I help the women", is how she puts it). The solidarity and generosity expressed in the life of this poor, ordinary, happy woman give this film a singularly Christian dimension.

"The Crime of Father Amaro" (Mexico, 2002), from director Carlos Carrera, is based on the novel by Portuguese writer Eça Queiroz. The film shows one of the most veiled forms of male abortion: that of priests who get girls and women pregnant and then force them to abort in order to avoid assuming responsibility and losing their status and reputation.

Arguments that cannot be supported

Some people argue that more flexible abortion legislation would bring about a "slaughter". Behind this allegation lies the idea that women are irresponsible creatures: if they interrupt their pregnancy, it is because they are bad mothers. Everyday reality gives the lie to this idea: the vast majority of

women struggle heroically for their children, putting forth enormous generosity and effort and exercising great responsibility, while the fathers of the children end up “aborting” them in practice by not recognizing them, abandoning them, and being completely unconcerned about their fate.

Some people argue that if abortion is decriminalized, there would be uncontrolled sexual promiscuity. And that if post-rape abortion is legalized, there would be more rapes. Behind such ideas lies a vision of human sexuality forged by millennia of patriarchal, male chauvinist culture. We do not know, nor can we even imagine, how we human beings would live our sexualities in societies where there was true equality between men and women. It is the culture of machismo, which experiences sexuality as an exercise of power and domination, and not as a relation of sharing and loving, which is the true cause of many forced pregnancies and, consequently, of many abortions. It is this macho culture that we should analyze and overcome if we want to get rid of abortion.

The abortion committed by men

“My husband doesn’t want any more children, and he threatened to leave me if I don’t get rid of it.” “This child is not my husband’s, and the father doesn’t want to take responsibility for it – he begged me to abort.” “The father is the boss, and he says if I don’t abort, he’ll get rid of me.” “I aborted because he paid for everything and told me he would keep helping me, but that he didn’t want kids or responsibilities.” “My son was the child of a priest, and he was the one who took me to get the abortion.” “My boyfriend asked me for a proof of my love, and when he found out that I was pregnant, he left me.” All these stories are frequent, familiar, painful.

There is always much talk about women who abort, about the laws which condemn them, about the sins they commit. It is high time we talked now about male abortion. In Latin America one out of every three homes is headed by a single woman, most of them mothers who have been abandoned by irresponsible men. In Latin American many fathers are simply missing, as can be seen in the growing number of single mothers. In most countries one out of every three mothers is “single”.

In Latin America five million abortions are practiced every year. The immense majority are male abortions, abortions provoked by the irresponsibility of men, by their violence, by their sexuality based on the abuse of power. The churches and the governments which so fiercely penalize, prosecute and condemn the abortions carried out by woman would do well to seek earnestly to prevent and eradicate male abortion, the principal cause of almost all abortions.

Interview 55
JESUS A FEMINIST?

RACHEL With its microphones in Nazareth, Emisoras Latinas now continues its interviews with Jesus Christ, who has returned to earth to see, as he himself puts it, what we have done in his name and in his absence. Good morning, Jesus Christ.

JESUS Good morning to you, Rachel. Shalom!

RACHEL Your statements in earlier programs, which have been very favorable to the rights of women, have turned out to be quite controversial. To be precise, there's one group of women that wants to talk with you and ask you some questions.

JESUS But if they're not here, how will I hear their questions?

RACHEL Wait a minute, let me put these earphones on you. Here we go… Okay, studios, go ahead with that call.

FEMINIST Our collective greets you as a man who has had so much influence on history, and we want first of all to ask you a question that for us is decisive. Do you, Jesus Christ, consider yourself to be a feminist?

JESUS Well, … [off mike] Rachel, please explain to me what they are asking about.

RACHEL She wants to know if …

FEMINIST To express it better what do you think was the most daring and novel thing you did on behalf of the women of your time?

JESUS The most daring and novel thing… I don't know. Let me think. Maybe it was when that woman who was suffering a flow of blood … They described her as hemorrhaging, because of her infirmity. And to hurt her even more, if you'll excuse me, they nicknamed her "Peeblood".

RACHEL Could you say more about this case for our audience?

JESUS Sure, why not? The religious laws of my country declared that all women were impure during their days of menstruation.

FEMINIST Is that so? And was that every month?

JESUS Every month, with each return of the moon, every woman became impure. And that meant that they couldn't pray in the synagogue, much less enter the temple. No one could touch them, neither their husbands nor anyone else. It was thought that they defiled people, contaminated them…

FEMINIST And how did they know if a woman was having her period?

JESUS It was quite humiliating. The women had to withdraw and undergo the shame of declaring that they were menstruating. They had to recognize themselves as impure. Otherwise, they were submitted to questioning.

FEMINIST If today a man should ask such an impertinent question, he'd get a good whack.

JESUS And a well-deserved one.

RACHEL Let's continue with the woman in your story.

JESUS I remember her name was Melanie. She had a strange sickness she was always menstruating…

FEMINIST That sickness is called menorrhage.

JESUS I'm sure they could cure it today, but then nobody knew what caused it. And people had many weird ideas about women, especially about their blood, which was associated with sinfulness. In the very fount of life people saw filth.

FEMINIST They say that what is dirty makes everything else dirty.

JESUS They used to read the Law with male eyes, and they wrote the Law with male egotism. They found the source of evil in our mother Eve.

FEMINIST Well, let me tell you, Jesus Christ, that's still happening today.

JESUS That poor woman Melanie had to live as someone perpetually impure. Worse, that illness left her sterile. She was dead even while alive, because a woman without children was considered worthless. She was the last of the last.

RACHEL And that's why you cured her….

JESUS No, no, nobody knew how to cure that. I met her one day, and when she approached me, I called her by her name, Melanie. And I touched her and let her touch me. That was something quite prohibited by the Law, something that nobody dared to do.

FEMINIST So you acted like a real feminist…

JESUS Rachel, explain to me that word she's using…

RACHEL Feminist means someone who sides with women and fights for their rights, for them to be respected … all of that. All that and a lot more.

FEMINIST So, Jesus Christ, were you a feminist?

JESUS Well, yes, I think I was, … and I still am!

FEMINIST And can we call you feminist in our documents?

JESUS Why not? Call me that, a feminist.

RACHEL Here in Nazareth, beside Jesus, a polemical feminist, this is Rachel Perez, reporting for Emisoras Latinas.

MUSIC

ANNOUNCER Another God is Possible. Exclusive interviews with Jesus Christ in his second coming to Earth. A production of María and José Ignacio López Vigil, with the support of the Syd Forum and Christian Aid.

INTERVIEW 55: BACKGROUND MATERIAL

In a male chauvinist society

Jesus was the child of the extremely macho culture associated with the Jewish religion, one completely marked by patriarchal traditions. Although Jesus by his words and actions broke with the machismo of his religion and his cultural context, Christian tradition has historically not been faithful to the example of Jesus. From the very beginning, and increasingly from the third century on, it has conformed fully to the molds of the dominant patriarchal culture, in which male hierarchy establishes and imposes the moral norms, the laws and the ways of relating to God.

Women: always discriminated against

Israel's civil and religious laws, as well as its customs, considered women to be inferior to men. The civil laws put women in the same category as slaves and young children: like them, they had to have males as their "owners". Women's testimony was not valid in a courtroom since they were considered mendacious. In religious matters they were also on the margins. They could not read the scriptures in the synagogue, nor could they give the blessing at meals. Women's exclusion from social life was much greater among the elite classes and in the big cities than it was in the rural areas. What scant importance was given to women was due exclusively to their usefulness for domestic chores, and they were appreciated basically for their fecundity. A woman unable to bear children was hardly worth her bread and butter.

No women witnesses, only men

There are many examples of patriarchal and male chauvinist traditions in the books of the Bible; they show up in the language, the customs, the laws and the contents of the theology. A curious example is found in the book of Genesis (24,1-4), when Abraham says to one of his servants: *Put your hand*

beneath my thigh and swear by Yahweh, God of heaven and earth... That was the way Abraham and all the biblical patriarchs made oaths. However, the word “thigh” is a euphemism: the man making the oath actually placed his hand on the other’s testicles. Grabbing the testicles of the other man was the way the commitment between the two was sealed. During the time of the Roman empire, also, whenever men made a promise or established a contract, they had the custom of raising their right hand to their genitals, the symbol of their virility and manly courage. Those semen-producing organs lent seriousness to the words of the agreement.

This custom, along with many others, reflected the discrimination against women: since they had no testicles, they could not “testify”, nor could they give “testimony” nor be heirs in a “testament”. In Jesus’ Palestine women had no role to play in the tribunals. This aspect of Jewish culture passed over into European languages: all those words (testify, testimony, testament) have the same basic root (testicles) and are excellent “testimony” to the persistence of patriarchal culture. For most of Christian history women’s words were thought to be worthless; the oaths they swore were always dubious.

For centuries in most of the world women had not right to own or inherit property, they could not sign contracts, they could not decide or choose for themselves, nor could they vote. All that has been slowly changing, but not without enormous efforts, struggles, suffering and blood.

Melanie, a super-marginalized woman

Jesus recalls his encounter with a sick woman, whom he calls Melanie. The three synoptic gospels relate the story of a “hemorrhaging woman” (Matthew 9,18-26), who was no doubt suffering from menorrhage, an irregular menstruation characterized by a continual flow of blood. Aside from the discomfort and debility that such a condition would cause her, she was also rendered permanently “impure”, since every woman was considered to be so during the days of her menstruation.

The book of Leviticus (15,19-30) is full of prohibitions concerning menstruating woman; it decrees that such a woman is impure for seven days, all that she touches is impure, anyone who touches her is impure, etc. For that reason Melanie was an extreme case of marginalization: female, sick, impure, sterile, and alone.

In all the macho, patriarchal cultures of ancient times, not just in Jesus’ culture, there was a strict taboo against interacting with women who were menstruating, and therefore impure and charged with negative forces opposed to God. That is precisely what makes Jesus’ gesture toward Melanie so momentous, since it flew in the face of deep-seated ideas and customs and effectively erased the borders between the pure and the impure.

The impure blood of menstruation

These same religious beliefs and biblical commands have echoed down the centuries, leading people to believe that the blood of menstruation was highly noxious. Due to profound scientific ignorance, husbands were forbidden to have contact with their wives during menstruation because it was thought that any children born of such relations would be infirm, leprous, and even possessed by the devil. It was also believed that contact with menstrual blood would dry up flowers, blacken bronze and

impede the growth of fruit. As late as the 13th century Christian theologians were warning people that it was a mortal sin to have relations with a menstruating woman because sickly or possessed children would result from them.

One of the hot themes for theological debate in the Middle Ages was whether a woman during menstruation (also called her “periodic pollution” or her “monthly venting”) could receive communion during mass or not. Even worse, the blood of a woman giving birth was considered to be more noxious that the menstrual blood. The Synod of Treves in the year 1227 established that after childbirth women needed to be “reconciled” with the Church, a disposition which combined the Jewish laws of ritual purification (fulfilled by Mary, the mother of Jesus, as Luke 2,22-23 relates) with Christian theologians’ rejection of the pleasure that is implicit in every sexual relation. In many cases of that epoch the religious hierarchy determined that women who died in childbirth could not be buried in Christian cemeteries because they had not be “reconciled”.

Feminism: an ethic

Feminism is the whole set of cultural and social theories, political practices, and ethical proposals motivated by the repudiation of the inequities and injustices that derive from the patriarchal culture in which humankind has lived for thousands of years and in which all that is male has always been exalted over all that is female.

Feminism holds that sexual differences should not result in gender differences, and it consequently struggles for the rights of women in all spheres, the most delicate and vital of them being sexuality. Feminism generates a different way of seeing the world and dwelling in it, one that is novel and very positive.

Not all women are feminists, nor are all feminists women. Feminism is not just a concern and a question of women and for women. Feminism is a proposal for radical change, so that the whole of society develops in the right direction, so that there is more democracy, so that human rights are truly respected.

Starting in the 19th century, feminism began to gain ground in the consciousness of women all around the world. The 20th century has been called by many “the women’s century” since it saw feminism finding expression in an infinite variety of ways and winning people’s sympathies in all countries and in all fields. It even found resonance in the field of Christian theology, where there now exists an extraordinary wealth of feminist thought.

Feminist theology

Theological feminism also produces a newness of vision, since it points out the contradictions that the patriarchal religious culture deems to be “eternal”. For example, we might ask ourselves, along with the Brazilian feminist theologian Ivone Gebara, the following provocative question: *Why is the blood of the man Jesus “redeeming”, while the blood of women is considered to be an “impurity”?* Or we might reflect, as did the German feminist theologian Dorotea Sölle some years ago, on the extent to which *the culture of obedience and submission*, which are taught to women as the greatest virtues,

has historically favored the installation of political dictatorships. Sölle links this idea with the way Nazism was made legitimate in Germany.

Feminist theology has labored to deconstruct and reconstruct Christian beliefs and traditions, ridding them of their more blatant patriarchal contents. Feminist theology proposes to transform women, so that they are no longer just “consumers” of teachings they receive from “sacred” men, but become creators of their own theological content, gathered from the richness of their own experience of life. Feminist theology completely rejects the masculine gender which Christianity has traditionally assigned to God, and while it does not explicitly state that Jesus was a feminist, it considers the movement which Jesus helped organize and in which women participated on a par with men, to be an tremendous source of inspiration.

Interview 56
HOMOSEXUALS?

RACHEL Homosexuals. Gays and lesbians. Some Christian churches deny them the sacraments or prohibit them from being priests or ministers. Other churches consecrate them as bishops. In the course of history they have been persecuted, ridiculed, tortured. Homosexual. Another urgent topic of discussion and another interview with Jesus Christ, as we continue our transmissions from Nazareth. Can we begin, Jesus?

JESUS Yes, Rachel, let's begin.

RACHEL Why did you condemn homosexuals?

JESUS Me? I never condemned them.

RACHEL Well, you didn't condemn them, but you said that they would not enter into the Kingdom of God, which is not exactly the same, but almost.

JESUS I believe you're mistaken, Rachel. I never said that.

RACHEL Let me read what's here in the New Testament "Make no mistake no fornicator or idolater, none who are guilty either of adultery or of homosexual perversion, no thieves or grabbers or drunkards or slanderers or swindlers…"

JESUS Who wrote that?

RACHEL Saint Paul. First Letter to the Corinthians, 6,10.

JESUS Aah, of course, but don't forget that Paul, from what they tell me, had been a Pharisee. It's clear that he held on to a lot of the same rigidities as the Pharisees. I didn't make that list of sinners that he drew up. I never said anything against homosexuals.

RACHEL But God did. With fire and brimstone he punished the inhabitants of Sodom, who were homosexuals.

JESUS Well,… I think you're wrong again.

RACHEL You mean the people of Sodom were not sodomites?

JESUS The sin of Sodom, as it was explained to me once by a rabbi, was the people's lack of hospitality toward God's messengers. It wasn't a sexual sin, but a social one.

RACHEL But, Mr. Christ, isn't homosexuality a sin against nature?

JESUS War, famine, leaving widows and orphans hungry – those things are sins against human nature.

RACHEL So, according to you, God does not condemn gays and lesbians?

JESUS Tell me something, Rachel. What does a mother do when she finds out her son is different from the rest? Does she shut the door on him when he calls? Does she throw a stone at him when he asks for her blessing? God is a mother, don't forget it.

RACHEL So, you defend them?

JESUS Many people attack them. For many they are the very last in line, but in the Kingdom of God they will be the first.

RACHEL I really don't know, hearing you talk like that. In your group of apostles, were there also some homosexuals?

JESUS Certainly.

RACHEL Maybe John, the youngest of the apostles, the one who wrote one of the gospels?

JESUS I gave John and his brother James the nickname "sons of thunder" because the two of them were very violent.

RACHEL Still, the painters always make John look very effeminate.

JESUS Because they didn't know him! And because they didn't understand about friendship between two men.

RACHEL What would you say to the homophobic churches that continue to repudiate and condemn gays and lesbians?

JESUS That if they are free of sin, let them throw the first stone. And that one day they will be measured with the same yardstick they are using to measure others today.

RACHEL In conclusion, Jesus, would you allow a homosexual person into your group and let him guide the community?

JESUS Why not? I never asked those who joined our movement anything about that. I didn't worry about minor matters. I asked them if they were ready to put their hand to the plow and to fight for justice. Just that.

RACHEL And to touch on something even more delicate, … would you approve of marriage between two men, or two women?

JESUS If they are united together in love, why not? Where there is love, God is there.

RACHEL Well, today you must let me call you Master. Thank you, Master, for your words. I think that many gays and lesbians who are listening to our program will take your words to be wonderfully good news. From Nazareth, this is Rachel Perez reporting for Emisoras Latinas.

MUSIC

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INTERVIEW 56: BACKGROUND MATERIAL

Sodom and Gomorrah

Sodomite is an old term meaning "homosexual". Many legislative codes still speak of the crime of "sodomy" when referring to homosexual conduct. The extremely frequent use of such language associates homosexuality with the "events" that occurred in the biblical cities of Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19), with the aim of justifying homophobia and even violence against gays and lesbians.

Did Sodom and Gomorrah really exist? "Sodom" derives from the Hebrew word meaning "burnt" and "Gomorrah" from the Hebrew word meaning "crushed". In its eagerness to find some historical basis for this well-known and much manipulated biblical narrative, National Geographic has publicized archeological investigations which examined the remains of two Iron Age cities near the Dead Sea, which appear to have been razed. According to the archeologists, these human settlements could have disappeared as a result of earthquakes, fires, invasions by enemies, or a combination of all three disasters. What the researchers consider most significant is that in this zone there are subterranean deposits of combustible gases (the biblical "sulphur"), so that it is quite possible that a fire produced by a natural disaster or other cause could have provoked uncontrollable conflagrations. Such calamitous events would have been preserved in the collective memory of the nomadic people as holocausts never before seen and would have been transmitted orally from generation to generation.

Independently of whatever happened in those cities or whether the cities themselves were real or mythological, the biblical narrative faults the neighbors of Lot for their lack of hospitality toward the "angels" of God, rather than for their homosexual intentions. It faults them for their "social sin", not their "sexual sin".

Paul: a Pharisee

In rejecting the very prejudicial text of Paul against homosexuals (1 Corinthians 6,9-10), Jesus reminds Rachel that Paul had been a Pharisee. Saul of Tarsus – his original name and city of birth – never met Jesus and never read any of the gospel texts about Jesus because they were written years

after he had traveled through the principal cities of the empire – Athens, Corinth, Thessalonica, Alexandria – announcing his own interpretation of the life and message of Jesus, which was in all likelihood an interpretation biased by his own cultural and theological origins.

Paul's ability to travel about and organize people was important for the spread of Christianity through the Roman empire, but was Paul's "Christianity" completely faithful to the originality of the message of Jesus and his movement, a message that demanded inclusiveness and equality in all human relations? Nowadays there are many studies which contrast the two traditions, that of Jesus and that of Paul, and point out the contradictions between them.

Unlike Jesus, Paul was born in a middle-class family and received an excellent education, both in Greek culture and in the rabbinic traditions taught in Jerusalem. In his pre-Christian period Paul violently persecuted the first followers of Jesus because of his own adherence to the pharisaic mentality, which was severe, intolerant, fanatical and discriminatory. It was a mentality that Jesus constantly criticized and rejected in his preaching. Paul interpreted Jesus and his message from the perspective of this religious tradition and on the basis of his subsequent personal and emotional experiences. Some elements, perhaps a great many, of Paul's pharisaic origins always stayed with him.

"The marriage of likenesses"

The U.S. historian John Boswell, head of the history department at Yale University, wrote a book called *Same-Sex Unions in Premodern Europe* (Vintage, 1995), in which he presents the disconcerting evidence of twelve years of research, namely, Catholic Church documents from the 6th to the 13th centuries that contain liturgies celebrating erotic unions between two men.

Boswell went to all the great libraries of Europe, including the Vatican Library, and found there dozens of original manuscripts containing the prayers, rubrics, psalms and ceremonies that were used for the blessing of homosexual love; they were liturgies performed in churches and officiated by priests. Boswell's book shows that matrimony was not declared a "sacrament" until the 13th century (at the Lateran Council in 1215) and that not until then were heterosexual relations determined to be the only legitimate ones. It was in the 14th century that western Europe began to develop its homophobic obsession and to consider homosexuality the most denigrating of sins. In the books of ritual that he found, Boswell observed that whole pages had been later ripped out or mutilated in order to obliterate what until then had been celebrated with religious joy and viewed as completely natural.

Not "against nature", but very present in nature

In 2006 the Natural History Museum in Oslo, Norway, opened a surprising exposition on homosexuality in animals. Using photos and films, the exhibit presented visitors with scenes of male giraffes pairing up, female whales copulating, and male monkeys stimulating one another genitally. There was visual evidence of gay flamingos, lesbian parrots, and insects, cats, dogs, and octopuses of the same sex having relations with one another.

The zoologist Meter Bockman, one of the organizers of the exposition, explained that scientists have observed homosexual behavior in 1,500 animal species and come to the conclusion that homosexuality is a fairly frequent natural reality. Bockman refuted the idea that such behavior occurs only in zoos, where the animals are confined; he stated that homosexuality is also seen among free animals in their natural habitats, and he indicated that among birds and mammals there are gay couples that stay together for life. The exposition pointed especially to the frequency of homosexuality among penguins; in some colonies one out of every ten pairs is homosexual, a proportion similar to that observed in human beings. The exhibit also displayed cases of bisexuality: in the case of the bonobo chimpanzees – the animals genetically closest to homo sapiens – all members of the species are bisexual. There are also species of fish that are transsexual and examples of fish that are transvestite.

On the basis of such observations Bockman concluded that the idea that sex serves only for reproduction is not true, not even among animals. Just as for human beings, sexual relations for animals have more to do with pleasure and interaction than with reproduction. The organizers of this exposition were attempting to rebut scientifically all the homophobic arguments and prejudices that describe homosexual behavior as an "unnatural" perversion, a sin against nature.

Homophobia in Latin America

Luiz Mott has a doctorate in anthropology, is a professor at the Federal University in Bahia, Brazil, and is founder and president of Grupo Gay da Bahia. He is also the author of 15 books and more than 200 articles about the history of homosexuality. He gives the following historical synthesis:

When America was discovered, Spain and Portugal were going through their worst period of intolerance against those who practiced "the abominable and horrible sin of sodomy." In that epoch the tribunals of the Inquisition functioning in the Iberian Peninsula considered sodomy to be a more serious crime than regicide or treason. In the Americas the tribunals of the Inquisition likewise prosecuted the "sodomites" mercilessly. This crime was one of the few that the early authorities in Brazil could punish with death without the need for previous consultation with the king of Portugal.

The moral theology treatises of the time of the Conquest offered ideas such as these: *Of all sins, sodomy is the most lewd, filthy and disgraceful; there is no other sin so abhorred by God and by the world. Because of this sin God brought the flood upon the earth and because of this sin he destroyed the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah; because of sodomy the Order of Knights Templar was destroyed throughout Christendom in its day. Therefore we command that every man who commits this sin be burned to death and turned into dust by fire, so that there will be no memory of his body or his burial.*

Upon landing in the New World, the Europeans found a great diversity of peoples and civilizations, and their sexual practices were quite different from those allowed in the Judeo-Christian cultural matrix. Some of the practices were diametrically opposed to European customs, especially as regards nudity, virginity, polygamy, divorce, and especially homosexuality, cross-dressing and transexuality. Already by 1514 a book called "The General and Natural History of the Indies" was declaring that a taste for that dreadful vice was to be found throughout the whole Caribbean and in some of the mainland territories. Documents show that the conquistadors were profoundly scandalized by this practice and attributed it to the lack of knowledge of the "true God".

The year 1513 can be considered the inaugural date for homophobic intolerance in the New World. In that year, according to a report of Pietro Martire and a dramatic engraving of that epoch, the conquistador Vasco de Balboa, upon finding a group of homosexual Indians in the isthmus of Panama, arrested 40 of them and handed them over to a pack of ferocious dogs to be devoured. The first record of institutional persecution comes from 1548: seven men were arrested in Guatemala, four of them clergy. They were saved from being burned at the stake only by a disturbance that happened to take place at the same time. Between 1591 and 1620 in Brazil 44 men and women were accused of sodomy and tried.

At the end of the 18th century 283 men and women were denounced for this offense. Of these 29 were lesbians, 5 of whom were fined or given spiritual penances, 3 of whom were banished, and two of whom were sentenced to receive lashes in public. As the result of an initiative of the International Commission of Human Rights for Gays and Lesbians, the most important international prize for homosexual rights is now known by the name of the most famous of those lesbians, Felipa de Souza. Mexico was the most aggressive persecutor of homosexuals during the colonial period: in 1658 some 123 sodomites were denounced in Mexico City and its vicinity; 19 of them were imprisoned, and 14 were burned at the stake.

The tribunals of the Inquisition disappeared from Peru and Mexico in 1820 and from Cartagena (Colombia) and Brazil in 1821, but mentalities were not changed by decrees. Homophobic machismo continues to be a prominent characteristic of Latin American culture. In the 20th century extreme secrecy, low self-esteem, marginality, murders and suicides became the daily fare of millions of gays, lesbians and transgendered persons in Latin America, as they continue to be repudiated by their families, humiliated in the streets and discriminated against in employment.

Research done in Brazil, a country with more than 17 million homosexuals, reveals that of all the social minorities, gays and lesbians are the most despised. There exists a continuum of prejudicial behavior that ranges from verbal insult to humiliating treatment in the mass media, to physical violence in the streets, to arbitrary arrests, and even to murders. Even today gays in Mexico are called “forty-one”, in memory of the 41 homosexuals who were arrested in just one night in 1901 and sentenced to degrading punishments, such as sweeping the streets of the capital and cleaning the public restrooms.

During the 1960s Cuba, identifying homosexuality with capitalist decadence, was exceptional for the violence with which it persecuted, imprisoned, and forced into exile hundreds of homosexuals. Tomás Gutiérrez Alea’s movie “Strawberry and Chocolate”, and Reinaldo Arenas’s memoir *Before Night Falls* (Penguin, 1994) reveal the homophobic intolerance of a period that fortunately is being left behind.

Until the mid-90s homosexuality was still a crime in Chile, Ecuador, Cuba, Nicaragua and Puerto Rico. In this first decade of the 21st century there are still laws against “sodomy” in Puerto Rico. The bishops and clergy of the Catholic Church and, more recently and rancorously, the authorities of the fundamentalist churches never let up on their attacks on homosexuals from the pulpits and in the mass media.

The homophobic Catholic doctrine

Despite the many scientific advances and the progress in human rights within societies that are increasingly more pluralist and complex, the most recent Vatican positions regarding homosexuality continue to be as negative as always: the homosexual orientation is considered to be a serious disorder, and homosexual acts are a grave sin. Consequently, the Church's official morality requires homosexuals (the official documents never use the word "lesbians") to observe perpetual celibacy.

In the "Declaration on certain questions of sexual ethics" (December, 1975), the head of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (later to be Pope Benedict XVI) treated the topic of "the homosexual condition" and distinguished between "homosexual tendency" and "homosexual acts" – these latter were defined as "intrinsically disordered."

Given the social advances that have taken place with respect to homosexuality, Cardinal Ratzinger addressed the topic again in October, 1986, in his "Letter to the bishops of the Catholic Church on pastoral care of homosexual persons." In that document Ratzinger explained that *the particular inclination of the homosexual person, although it is not in itself sinful, nevertheless constitutes a more or less strong tendency to behavior which is intrinsically evil from a moral viewpoint. For this reason the inclination must itself be considered to be objectively disordered.*

The severity of Catholic doctrine derives from two ideas that are persistent in Catholic morality: that sexual activity is acceptable only if it remains open to reproduction and that sexual pleasure ("self-gratification") is in itself negative.

Ratzinger: doctrinal bases for discrimination

As anti-homophobic legislation was being advanced in several countries around the world and people were becoming more conscious of the terribly unjust discrimination suffered by homosexuals, the Vatican in July, 1992, published a document called "Considerations for a Catholic response to legislative proposals to prevent discrimination against homosexuals". The restrictive language of the document shows that the Congregation headed by Cardinal Ratzinger was going in quite the opposite direction, for it states that with regard to non-discriminatory legislation "sexual orientation" does not constitute a quality comparable to race, ethnic group, etc. As opposed to these qualities, the homosexual orientation is an objective disorder.

Soon after he was elected Pope in June, 2005, Cardinal Ratzinger, alarmed by Spanish legislation allowing for homosexual marriages, stated: *Nowadays various practices – free unions, civil marriages, the different ways of dissolving matrimonies, as well as pseudo-marriages between persons of the same sex – are all expressions of an anarchic freedom which dishonestly attempt to pass themselves off as a form of true liberation for men.*

The first document made public (in November, 2005) by Ratzinger once he was pope was an instruction which counseled that "persons with homosexual tendencies" should not be accepted into the Catholic priesthood.

Nothing foreign ceases to be human

There are many ways that people reject those who are “other” or “different” from them; thus they justify discrimination against women, foreigners, those of another race, those who suffer certain illnesses, and others. However, one of the strongest prejudices is homophobia, the rejection of homosexuals and lesbians for being as they are and for feeling as they feel. The Spanish philosopher Fernando Savater uses the word “heterophobia” to bundle together all the diverse forms of prejudice, and he proposes this humanist ideal: *Our maxim cannot be simply “Nothing human is alien to me,” but must also be “Nothing alien to me should I fail to recognize as human.”* And homosexuality, whether it be more alien or less alien to us, is a human reality.

Interview 57
ASCENSION OR ASSUMPTION?

RACHEL Emisoras Latinas now continues its broadcasts from Nazareth. In the basement of the Church of the Holy Family a cemetery is preserved that dates from the times of Jesus. We have organized a trip here in the company of Jesus Christ himself. Are some of your relatives perhaps buried here, Jesus?

JESUS When my father Joseph died, we buried him where they buried all the Nazarenes. But all this has changed so much …

RACHEL Was his death hard for you?

JESUS Yes, my mother was left a widow with several children. Everything changed when my father was gone.

RACHEL And how did he die?

JESUS Not of sickness or old age. It was men who made him die before his time. Those were difficult days in Galilee. The Roman soldiers committed many atrocities. And my father was a just man. Because he gave refuge to some fellows who were fleeing a massacre, the soldiers gave him a terrible beating. He was left badly injured and was never able to get up again.

RACHEL I'm sorry to make you remember something so painful. And your mother? Where did she die?

JESUS I think in Jerusalem, but I've heard people say that it was in Ephesus. They say John took her to that distant city. I had asked him to look after her for me. But tell me, why do you want to talk about this, Rachel?

RACHEL Because our listeners want to know if what they say about the end of your mother's life is true or not.

JESUS And what do they say?

RACHEL That she didn't die, because … because she couldn't die.

JESUS That can't be. We all die. From dust we come and to dust we return.

RACHEL They also say that your mother's body was so immaculate that the earth was incapable of swallowing it up.

JESUS When the grain of wheat falls to the ground, it decays, but it does not die. It continues to live in the new sprout.

RACHEL Well, what they say is that she did not die, but went to sleep. That “sleeping” business – is it truth or legend?

JESUS It’s a beautiful parable, because in dying we awaken to God. One door closes, and another opens.

RACHEL But they speak not of a door, but of a staircase. They claim that Mary went up to heaven, but differently from the way you went. Because we know that you ascended by yourself, but she was lifted up by angels.

JESUS That’s what they say?

RACHEL Just so.

JESUS I think they’re being rather inventive there.

RACHEL No, it’s a dogma of faith. The official word they use in your case is “ascension”. In her case they call it “assumption”. Using modern language, we’d say that you “lifted off” into space. And your mother was abducted, or absorbed.

JESUS What nonsense, Rachel! Nobody has to ascend anywhere, because God is not up there. God is here, within me, within you. God is the heart of all his creatures.

RACHEL What about heaven, then? In our previous programs you told us that there is no hell. Is there no heaven either? What happens after death?

JESUS Heaven is the work of God’s hands. We all live in the hands of God. And when we die, we will still be in God’s hands.

RACHEL But if it’s not asking too much, since you come from “up there”, could you give us an idea of what’s it’s like, just an inkling?

JESUS If you were to tell an unborn child what life was going to be like outside his mother’s womb, he wouldn’t believe you. He wouldn’t even understand you.

RACHEL So you won’t give us even a hint?

JESUS I assure you that no eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind can imagine what God has prepared for those who truly love.

RACHEL So we are left hanging between heaven and earth – without ascensions or assumptions, but still with great hope. From Nazareth, this is Rachel Perez, Emisoras Latinas.

MUSIC

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INTERVIEW 57: BACKGROUND MATERIAL

The great beyond…

All religions propose answers to the great questions about the meaning of life and of history, and their great attraction is the certainty they offer about a reality "beyond" the life we know, about a life that goes beyond death. In the late classical Jewish tradition that ulterior reality was known as "resurrection", in Christianity we speak of "eternal life", and in Islam people are promised "paradise".

The ultimate frontier

In the cultures of many non-Christian peoples death is accepted with a naturalness that Christianity has forgotten. The ancient Egyptians had a beautiful vision of death: dying was going to the "other shore". On that trip the bird-soul was lifted toward the sun, and its existence was perpetuated in the image of the god Osiris. Among some North American Indians not only is there an attitude of serenity in the face of death, but people close to death take formal leave of their family and friends, depart from the village and sit down all alone, waiting for death to arrive. In fact, they invoke death so that, even before physical death touches them, they have prepared their spirit: they have already bid farewell and died to all that was their life.

In Christian culture, so influenced by a western philosophy centered on the individual self, fear of death is a logical element, because in death our "self" will be dissolved. And we cannot really imagine a continuation of our life without a continuation of our self. The attractiveness of religions is precisely that: they promise us salvation in the future, and that future salvation includes the survival of the self. At the same time, because Christian culture has separated human nature from the rest of nature and has posited such a profound dichotomy between body and spirit, it surrounds death with an aura of negativity and even of terror.

An alternative, truly Christian perspective would have us see death as an indispensable, natural phase in the process of life, a end that is already present in all vital processes. Death is a sign that nature has dominion over individual lives. However, when human beings have not felt linked to Mother Nature or have felt themselves superior to her, with the right to dominate and exploit her, then they will experience death as a fate imposed from outside, as a tragedy.

If there were no death…

In his novel *The Intermittences of Death*, Portuguese writer José Saramago, winner of the Nobel prize for literature, creates a surprising plot. Something extraordinary happens in a certain country: death decides to stop working, and everybody stops dying. At first there is great euphoria, but very soon chaos and desperation set in. If there is no death, then there is no time and everyone will have an eternal old age, which soon turns out to be unbearable. In this distressing situation, which people are

unable to manage or assimilate, everyone seeks out ways, honest or dishonest, compassionate or heartless, to get death back to work. Finally one day death decides to reappear… The reflection prompted by this daring argument can help us understand the real meaning death has for our limited life.

Ascension and assumption "into heaven"

When traditional Christian faith affirms that at death the body is destroyed and the immortal soul enters into eternal life, it is establishing a hierarchy in which the body is considered inferior to the soul and of less value. This idea of the superiority of the spirit over the body runs through the whole of the Christian tradition and has had negative consequences of all kinds. Such an idea, however, does not derive from Jesus, for whom the body was the temple of God, and the divine was not above or outside the human. The Catholic dogmas of the Jesus' Ascension into heaven and Mary's Assumption into that same heaven attempt to compensate for the deep-rooted Catholic contempt for the body by establishing an exceptional privilege for at least two human bodies.

The Assumption: a dogma of faith

The tradition of a God "up there", living in a distant heaven, is central to official Catholic doctrine. In November 1950 Pope Pius XII speaking *ex cathedra* – that is, infallibly, as defined in the previous century – proclaimed the dogma of the Assumption of Mary into "heaven" with the following uncompromising words: *We declare, promulgate and define that it is a divinely revealed dogma that the Immaculate Mother of God, the ever Virgin Mary, at the end of her earthly life was elevated to celestial glory in body and soul. Therefore, if anyone dares (God forbid) to deny willingly or to doubt what has been defined by us, let him know that he has departed completely from the divine and Catholic faith.*

Ascension: a metaphor

The Ascension of Jesus is not a dogma of faith. As it is related in the gospels (Matthew 28,16-20; Mark 16,19-20; Luke 24,50-52; Acts 1,3-11), the official doctrine considers this "ascent" to be a "historical" event, one of the many details that make up the "biography" of Jesus. This episode, however, is a metaphor: forty days after rising, Jesus "ascended into heaven." The number 40 is symbolic in all Bible literature. In this case, it is meant to represent a complete and unrepeatable period, during which those who belonged to Jesus' movement and believed in his message became totally convinced that Jesus continued to be present with them and among them, that he was already in God's hands, and that God "had won the ballgame", not the bad guys.

Heaven will be a party

The heavens are what we see "up there", a blue mantle covering the earth, where clouds roam about and where the sun, the moon and stars shine brightly. Most religious traditions have placed God in "heaven", in that "up there" which is external, distant and superior. But Jesus did not. Jesus spoke of God "within" each person and spoke also of making God present in just, inclusive, compassionate human relations that manifest solidarity.

Jesus often spoke of the full realization of God's Kingdom, but he never called that heaven. In many passages the gospels (above all Matthew) speak of "the Kingdom of heaven", but that concept is not from Jesus. He always spoke of and proclaimed the "Kingdom of God".

Jesus never referred either to a final disengagement from history. He used several images to speak of the future and the "new world": human beings would see God with their own eyes, the patrimony would be shared by all, festive laughter would be heard, God's family would be gathered together at a banquet, the bread of life would be broken and shared… And all would be changed: the last would be first, the poor would no longer be poor, the hungry would be satisfied, the sad would rejoice…

What is most original in the message of Jesus and his movement is their claim that all this begins now on earth, in the world of human relations. All of this happens when we live in community and solidarity, when we serve and share with others, when we care for life and help those who are sick or distressed…. All this begins here as an inkling of what will be the fullness. The image of the festive banquet with the house full to overflowing was central to the language used by Jesus to speak of the future (Matthew 22,1-14). "Heaven" was to be a communal feast that would have no end.

Interview 58
ANGELS AND ARCHANGELS?

RACHEL The microphones of Emisoras Latinas are still located in Nazareth, where we are covering the second coming of Jesus Christ, who has just given us his views about the world of the great beyond. But, Jesus, are we talking about a heaven with angels or without them? Let's clear up that point.

JESUS Rachel, when we were in Bethlehem before, I explained to you that angels do not exist. They are poetry, just different names for God.

RACHEL But the people insist how can they not exist if the Bible is full of them? One of them appears on the very first pages, guarding the gates of paradise with a sword of fire. And they're found up to the last pages of the Bible, blowing their trumpets in the Apocalypse.

JESUS Of course, because the Bible is full of messages, and my people used to fancy that there were messengers to carry those messages, namely, the angels. Look, my fellow Jews had a great respect for God. Almost too great. They wouldn't even pronounce his name, and they washed their hands before writing it out. So in order to avoid using God's name, they used the names of angels.

RACHEL But do they exist or not? When I was a little girl they used to tell me I had a guardian angel always by my side.

JESUS And what did that angel guard you from?

RACHEL From accidents and other dangers. Once he saved me from being crushed by a trolley.

JESUS So what happened with all those children who died in accidents? Was it that their angels were asleep, or perhaps didn't take care of them?

RACHEL Wait, we have a call… Hello, yes?… A listener wants to take part. She says she's an angelologist.

JESUS A what?

RACHEL An angelologist, an expert in angels.

ANGELOLOGIST I would like to express my most vehement protest in the name of the archangels Michael, Rafael, Gabriel and Uriel, and in the name of the nine choirs of seraphim and cherubim that accompany them. They cannot speak for themselves on the radio. And since they are beings of light, totally transparent, that impostor pretending to be Jesus Christ cannot see them and denies their existence. Get thee behind me!

JESUS What's that she said at the end, Rachel?

RACHEL I think she insulted you… We have another call. As you see, Jesus, angels are fashionable these days… Hello?

SERAPHIM This is Seraphim del Monte calling from Caracas, and although they gave me an angelic name, I don't believe in them. Consider the names mentioned by the woman who just called in. Michael means "Who is like God?", Rafael means "God heals", and Gabriel means "divine strength". That "el" at the end of each angel's name is just a form of the Hebrew word for God. It's just as Jesus said the angels are simply nicknames for the one and only God. They're poetry!

RACHEL Thank you, Seraphim del Monte. So, Jesus, you didn't see any angels, neither in the desert when you were fasting nor in the garden of olives when you were praying?

JESUS I didn't see a single one. In the desert the real angels were some camel drivers who guided me and gave me water, but in the garden that night no one came to help me.

RACHEL And so, if angels really don't exist, then why do so many people believe in them?

JESUS Because we think that God is somewhere way up in the sky. So we put angels somewhere in the middle, between ourselves and that heaven where the distant God supposedly dwells. When we realize that God is actually with us and that his message is close to us, then we won't need any messengers.

RACHEL Is this topic of the angels clear enough for you, listeners of Emisoras Latinas? Or are there still some ruffled feathers, I mean, some doubts in your mind? Reporting from Nazareth, this is Rachel Perez. Remember, you'll find this interview and all the earlier ones on our web page, at www.emisoraslatinas.net.

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INTERVIEW 58: BACKGROUND MATERIAL

A very ancient belief

The word "angel" comes from the Greek and means "messenger". Many ancient religions taught of these beings, who served to carry messages from a distant God to human beings. The books of the Bible have an abundance of angels. The biblical world was one where reigning kings were

surrounded by their courts and where the courtiers and servants played a vital role in the functioning of the king's governance.

In such a world God was conceived by human beings to be a great King, and the angels were his courtiers. The Israelites were a monotheistic people, but they always lived surrounded by peoples with polytheistic traditions. The beliefs of these neighboring peoples exercised a strong influence on Judaism and found expression in the Bible in many ways. The angels of the "celestial court" of the God-King became something like semi-divine beings, to whom the people could have regular recourse in order to "make present" the unnamable God.

In all these religions angels always served as intermediaries between God and human beings. For Persians, it was an angel who revealed "the truth" to Zarathustra. For Jews, an angel held back Abraham's hand so that he might understand that God did not want him to kill his son Isaac. For Christians, the angel Gabriel announced to Mary that she would have an extraordinary son. For Muslims, the same angel Gabriel called Muhammad in order to dictate to him the Koran, God's revelation.

Angels: male and with wings

The Israelites were exiled in Babylon some six hundred years before Jesus' time, so that it was possibly that Mesopotamian influence that made them begin to represent angels as having wings, just as the Babylonians represented their divine beings. Endowed with wings, angels could move more easily between the "heaven up above", where God reigns, and the earth inhabited by humans. Just like God, angels were always male: the court of a masculine God was made up of masculine servants.

An official belief

This ancient mythical belief is even today maintained as the official doctrine of the Catholic Church. The Catholic Catechism speaks of angels in numbers 328 to 336, using the following language: *The existence of the spiritual, non-corporeal beings that Sacred Scripture usually calls "angels" is a truth of faith. The witness of Scripture is as clear as the unanimity of Tradition. … As purely spiritual creatures angels have intelligence and will: they are personal and immortal creatures, surpassing in perfection all visible creatures, as the splendor of their glory bears witness. … The whole life of the Church benefits from the mysterious and powerful help of angels.*

A contemporary belief

In the present day "angelology" has been gaining ever more ground as another expression of the religious "revival" under way, in which all types of beliefs, ancient and modern, flow together and are blended. In the Internet thousands of sites can be found which promote belief in angels and provide "scientific" bases for this myth. They explain, for example, how to establish communication with these beings: *Their speech is spiritual, but spiritual sound does not reach us through our ears. When they speak to us, there is activated an energy center in the crown of the head (also called the "crown's farm"), which has a physical relation with the pituitary gland. When angels speak to us, it is this*

center that gets activated, and the sound is exceptionally clear. There is no sound system on earth that can attain such clarity or that makes such an impression on the memory.

A belief based on hierarchies

It is quite significant that both the traditional belief in angels and the post-modern angelology posit a clear hierarchy among the angels, just as both the ancient world and modern-day society allot power according to political, social, cultural, religious and gender hierarchies.

The hierarchical classification of angels that has had the most influence on the imagination and the fantasy of generations right up to the present day is one that was elaborated by an anonymous author (sometimes called Pseudo-Dionysius) who lived between the 4th and 5th centuries. In a book called "The Celestial Hierarchy" this theologian expounded his doctrine of angels, dividing them into nine choruses and three groups. The highest group included seraphim, cherubim and thrones; the intermediate group encompassed dominations, virtues and powers; and the group closest to human beings was composed of principalities, archangels and angels. The author gave names to seven archangels: Michael, Gabriel, Raphael, Uriel, Chamuel, Jofiel and Zadkiel. Of course, all the names are masculine and all end in "el", which was a Hebrew way of referring to God without actually pronouncing his name (Yahweh). Catholic theology accepted the angelic hierarchy with its nine choruses, but it has not gone so far as to make this particular teaching a doctrine of faith. Out of the seven traditional names the Church accepts only Michael, Gabriel and Raphael, since they are the only ones mentioned in the Bible.

In his interview with Rachel, Jesus sums up all the official doctrine and all the angelology of past and present with a saying full of common sense: *The angels are poetry.*

Interview 59
ADAM AND EVE?

PRIEST *And God said to the woman "Because you have listened to the serpent you will bring forth children in pain, you will follow after your husband, and your husband will rule over you." This is the Word of God!*

FAITHFUL *Thanks be to God!*

RACHEL Once again we have the benefit of an exclusive interview with Jesus Christ on this his second coming to earth. Our microphones are still in Nazareth, and today we are in the church of the convent of Santa Clara, where he just heard a scripture reading. What do you think, Jesus, about the punishment God imposed on Eve?

JESUS Although it's right at the beginning of the Bible, I never liked that story. I never mentioned in my preaching. In fact, never spoke of either Adam or Eve.

RACHEL For what reason?

JESUS Because that story doesn't do justice to the heart of God.

RACHEL Maybe it doesn't do justice, but that's what's written down there. Do you know who wrote that Genesis story?

JESUS I'm not sure who wrote it, but I'm certain it was a man.

RACHEL Why are you so sure of that?

JESUS Everybody knows that it is women who give birth, it is you women who perform the miracle of life. But that story of Adam and Eve turns the world upside down imagine, a man giving birth to a woman!

RACHEL You're referring to the rib…

JESUS Yes, that rib… That's a dreadful tale that confuses everything.

RACHEL Afterwards the serpent and the forbidden tree appear …

JESUS That's worse still, because they picture the woman as the bad one, the temptress… I remember the rabbi in Nazareth, an old grouch. He was always repeating a verse from another book of the Bible *From a woman sin had its beginning, and because of her we all die.* God covers his ears when he hears such nonsense.

RACHEL So, … the story of Adam and Eve is not inspired by God? It's not the word of God?

JESUS It's more likely the word of man, because God does not want anybody dominated by anybody else, neither the woman by the man, nor the man by the woman.

RACHEL You'll excuse me, Jesus, but I prepared carefully for this interview, and I found this text. Listen "The head of every man is Christ, and the head of a woman is her husband." This was written by Saint Paul in his first letter to the Christians of Corinth. What do you think of that?

JESUS Paul wasn't thinking, or even feeling, when he wrote that. Because I always taught clearly that nobody should be over anybody. Nobody is head of anybody because all people, all women and men, have the same value in God's eyes.

RACHEL What should we do, then, with the rib and the apple and that whole story of Adam and Eve? Take it out of the Bible?

JESUS Leave it there, but store it away in the crate for old clothes.

RACHEL So what are we left with?

JESUS With the good news that there are no tempting serpents or forbidden fruits, and that paradise will exist on earth when nobody dominates anybody else.

RACHEL I don't think our audience will agree much with what you're saying. Several listeners have already called to say that these interviews are very short and that you always leave us with more questions than answers.

JESUS Well, how wonderful, Rachel! A person who has questions is thinking. A person who has only answers is just obeying.

RACHEL What about you, friends of Emisoras Latinas? What group are you in? Do you have questions or are you satisfied with answers? Remember our telephone number, 714-4000, seven-one-four, four thousand. We're always ready to take your calls. And on the Internet you can find us at www.emisoraslatinas.net. From Nazareth, this is Rachel Perez.

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INTERVIEW 59: BACKGROUND MATERIAL

Through her fault…

The books of the Bible are full of misogynist and patriarchal references in which women appear as inferior beings; they are portrayed as subordinate and subsidiary, dangerous and sinful. The verse that Jesus recalls hearing from the rabbi of his town, *From a woman sin had its beginning, and because of her we all die,* is just one among many. It appears in the book of Ecclesiasticus 25,24.

Paul, a misogynist

Although Paul presented himself as a disciple of Jesus and a proponent of his message, and although he was assisted by women in the founding and running of Christian communities throughout the Roman empire, his letters are filled with misogynist comments, not unlike those of other thinkers of his time. Jewish by religion and Pharisee by education, Paul believed that women were inferior to men and should be subordinated to them. Rachel cites 1 Corinthians 11,3 as an example of how Paul set up a rigid hierarchical order. One of Paul's most patriarchal texts, based on the Genesis myth, appears in the first letter to Timothy (2,11-15). Paul formulated his whole doctrine of salvation on the basis of the myth of the sin of Adam and Eve (see 1 Corinthians 11,8 and 15,21).

A myth with perverse consequences

In the myth of Adam and Eve, which was conceived three thousand years ago and appears in the first pages of the Bible used by Jews and Christians, Eve disobeys God and causes Adam to sin; as a result God submits women to the domination of men. This myth has been the origin of much of the male chauvinism and the discrimination and violence against women that have filled the whole history of the western world, which has been molded by Judeo-Christian culture. That mythical Eve represents all women, and on the basis of that founding myth all women are judged, despised and rejected. Western literature of every epoch shows evidence of this colossal abuse.

We offer several examples of some of the argumentation that employs the myth of Genesis. In the second century Tertullian, a doctor of the church, wrote and preached as follows: *Woman, you should walk about dressed for mourning and wearing rags. You should present yourself as a penitent, awash in tears in order thus to redeem the crime of having lost the human race. You are the gateway to hell, you were the one who broke the seals of the forbidden tree, you were the first to violate divine law, you were the one who corrupted the man whom the devil did not dare to attack directly. You were the cause of the death of Jesus Christ.*

In the fourth century the great theologian Augustine preached the following: *Woman is an inferior being. It is in keeping with justice and the natural order of humanity that women serve men.*

In that same century Jerome, another doctor of the church and translator of the Bible into Latin, exclaimed: *If a woman does not submit to a man, who is her head, she makes herself guilty of the same sin as a man who does not submit to Christ.*

"Harmful root and source of vices"

In the sixth century the bishop Isidore of Seville, declared a saint and considered in his day to be "the most learned man who has appeared in recent times", stated the following: *Man was made for his own sake. Woman was created only as a help to man.*

In that same century, the year 585, the Synod of Macon debated about whether at the hour of the general resurrection women would be transformed into men in order to be able to enter into heaven.

In the eleventh century Marbode, the bishop of Rennes, France, who was considered the "king of orators" uttered the following: *Of all the many traps that our wily enemy lays for us, the worst one, which almost nobody can avoid, is woman, the weak stem, the harmful root, the source of vices, who spreads scandal though all the world. Oh, woman, sweet evil, honeyed poison! Who persuaded our first father to taste of the forbidden fruit? A woman!*

In the thirteenth century the most influential Catholic theologian of all time, Thomas Aquinas, wrote as follows: *For the good order of the human family, some need to be governed by others who are wiser than they. Therefore woman, weaker as regards vigor of soul and corporal strength, is by nature subject to man, in whom reason predominates. The father should be more loved than the mother, and he deserves greater respect because his part in conception is active, whereas that of the mother is simply passive and material. … Woman is a defect of nature, a sort of stunted, mutilated little man. If women are born, it is due to a defect in the sperm or to humid winds.*

"Made from a curved rib"

In the fifteenth century, the German Dominican Jakob Sprenger, general inquisitor and specialist in judging and executing witches, offered this argument: *In the composition of the first woman there was a fault, since she was made from a curved rib, curved as if in the opposite direction from a man's. And since woman is an imperfect animal due to that fault, she cannot help but deceive.*

In the sixteenth century, French theology professor Jean Benedicti taught the following: *If a woman, swollen with pride in her intelligence, her beauty, her possessions, and her parentage, despises her husband and refuses to obey him, she thereby rebels against the judgment of God, who wants a woman to submit to her husband, since he is more noble and excellent than the woman and is made in the image of God, whereas woman is made only in the image of man.*

In the eighteenth century Jean-Jacques Rousseau, one of the ideologues of the French Revolution, proposed the following considerations: *The education of woman should be organized in relation to men. They should be taught to be pleasing to men's eyes, to win men's respect and love, to educate boys during childhood, to care for men when they are grown, to counsel and comfort them, to make their lives pleasant and happy. Such are the duties of women at all times, and this is what they should be taught when they are young.*

In the nineteenth century French philosopher Pierre Proudhon, considered to be an important social reformer, stated: *Woman is a sort of midway condition between man and the rest of the animal kingdom. … In the mental realm, as in generation, woman contributes nothing of her own: she is a passive being, enervating, given to tedious chatter and caresses. Whoever desires to preserve his corporal and spiritual energies in their fullness should flee from women. They are homicidal.*

With the exception of official Catholic thought – which emanates from the Vatican, the most male chauvinist institutional power of the West – the twentieth century has made it ever more "politically

incorrect" for famous male writers and thinkers to express themselves in the same patriarchal terms that have been used by scholars and teachers down through the centuries. Nevertheless, there are many people who even today continue to think that way and who consequently act on the basis of such ideas.

A collection of misogynist statements can be found in the book of French journalist Agnes Michaux, *Contra ellas* (Edhasa, 1997), and in that of Tama Starr, *The Natural Inferiority of Women: Outrageous Pronouncements by Misguided Males* (Poseidon, 1991).

Also in other cultures and religions

Misogyny, machismo and discrimination against women are by no means a monopoly of Judeo-Christian culture. It comes from much further back, predating even the oldest biblical writings. The dominance of an unjust patriarchal culture had its beginnings some ten thousand years ago, when human beings first discovered agriculture. It was at that time they began to disconnect themselves from nature and to feel that they could dominate nature and control it. Societies began to accumulate surpluses of grains, they developed warfare to defend their granaries, and they consequently began to adore bellicose masculine gods who justified their wars. Right up to the present day we are heirs of that androcentric culture, whose center is the male and whose supreme value is masculinity.

Texts similar to those found in Judeo-Christian culture can be found in the philosophical and religious writings of both cultured Greece and powerful Rome. They are also abundant in the Koran, the sacred book of Islam, as well as in the literature of the sages and the writings of the founders of the different eastern religions. We offer some examples:

In the fifth century before Christ, we read in the Hindu scripture called *Panchatantra*: *Such are the virtues of women: a bunch of vices.*

In the sixth century before Christ Confucius, who promoted a new religion in China, taught: *Woman is what is most corrupting and most corruptible in all the world.*

In the seventh century before Christ Buddha was claiming: *Woman is evil. Any time she has a chance, a woman will sin.*

In the eighth century before Christ, Zarathustra, the great reformer of Persian religion, instructed women thus: *You should adore man as a divinity. Nine times in the morning you should stand before your husbands with your arms folded and repeat to him: What do you want me to do, my lord?*

In the fourth century before Christ, the great philosopher Aristotle offered this consideration: *Nature makes women only when it cannot make men.*

In the fifth century before Christ, the Greek dramatist Euripides stated: *There is nothing in the world worse than a woman, except another woman.* And the great Athenian statesman Pericles declared: *Women, slaves and foreigners are not citizens.*

The story of Adam and Eve in Paradise appears also in the Koran. In the seventh century after Christ, the Koran (Sura 4, verse 38) states: *Men are superior to women because God has granted them predominance over women. Husbands who suffer disobedience from their wives can punish them, leave them solitary on their beds, or even beat them.* And Sura 24, verse 59, declares: *God has not granted to man a more pernicious calamity than woman.*

The black Eve

The science of genetics has taught us that modern human beings did not originate in any kind of biblical paradise with forbidden trees and enticing serpents. Rather homo sapiens was born in Africa about 150 thousand years ago, after evolving for many hundreds of thousands of years from more primitive human species, which in turn had evolved for millions of years from more primitive hominids, which in turn had evolved from early primates, etc. At some point, about 100 thousand years ago, those first modern humans left Africa, but not because they were expelled from any paradise. Rather, they emigrated out of Africa toward Europe and Asia in search of food, and also adventure. Thousands of years later they crossed the frozen steppes of the northern climes and began to populate the Americas.

Genetic research on mitochondrial DNA, which is present in all human cells but is inherited only from the mother, indicates that that initial human migration was undertaken by only one of the thirteen human clans that originally populated the African continent. That single adventurous clan was made up of a very small number of men and women. Some scientists has called it “Lara’s clan” since they were all considered to be descendents of a single woman, poetically christened “Lara”. That black woman is the true Eve, the mother of all humankind.

We have Africa in our blood

A well-known geneticist from Oxford, Richard Dawkins, speaks thus of our African birthplace: *All the fossils from the years when our species was in formation come from Africa, and molecular tests suggest that the ancestors of all present-day peoples remained there for a long time, approximately until the last few hundred thousand years. We have Africa in our blood, and Africa holds our bones. We are all Africans. This fact alone makes Africa’s ecosystem an object of exceptional fascination, for that is the community that molded our species; that is the community of animals and plants in which we did our ecological apprenticeship. But even if Africa were not our continent of origin, it would still captivate us since it is perhaps the last great refuge of Pleistocene ecologies. If you wish to have a last look at the Garden of Eden, forget the Tigris and the Euphrates and the dawn of agriculture. … Turn rather toward Kilimanjaro, or look toward the Rift Valley. Those are the places in which human beings were designed to flourish.*

More questions than answers

When we reflect thoughtfully and critically on the religious beliefs and traditions we have received from the past, as we have done with the myth of Adam and Eve, we frequently end up asking ourselves more questions. The interviews with Jesus and the answers he gives Rachel also generate more questions.

That is the way people grow and make progress. The great Brazilian pedagogue Paulo Freire had confidence in questions and proposed using them as a way of teaching. He used to say: *We must develop a pedagogy of questions. We have always practiced a pedagogy of answers, where the teachers answered the questions asked by the students.* Often, in expounding the so-called "magisterium of the church", those who have the role of "teachers" practice, promote and impose a pedagogy of answers – answers to questions that nobody nowadays is even asking!

Interview 60
IMMACULATE CONCEPTION?

RACHEL We're still in Nazareth, the heart of Galilee, and Emisoras Latinas is in the heart of all of you, our wonderful listening audience, who are following step by step, interview by interview, controversy after controversy, the second coming of Jesus Christ to earth. Mr. Jesus Christ…

JESUS Tell me, Rachel, am I here on time?

RACHEL You always arrive on time for our interviews. How do you manage it without a watch?

JESUS We country folk can tell time by the sun. So what do you want to ask me about today?

RACHEL Well, we have already talked a lot about your mother Mary, about how she gave birth to you, about the other children she had. But we are perhaps forgetting the most extraordinary aspect of her personality her immaculate conception.

JESUS What are you referring to? I never heard her talk about that.

RACHEL Well, in reality even she couldn't tell you about it because that marvel happened without her even being aware of it.

JESUS But what did that marvel consist in?

RACHEL I've done my homework on this on the 8th of December, 1854, Pope Pio Nono declared as a dogma of faith that your mother Mary, given the sublime mission given to her in the history of salvation, was born without the original stain that sullies the souls of all of us human beings at birth.

JESUS Are you going back over that story of the sin of Adam and Eve? As I already explained to you, Rachel, that story is a parable, like the ones I used to tell. For example, once I spoke of a powerful king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. Another time I spoke of a shepherd with a hundred sheep, and one of them got lost. Those things didn't really happen, they're just comparisons…

RACHEL We have a call coming in… Yes, hello?

PRIEST Begging the pardon of Jesus Christ or of whoever that fraud is, I beg of you, I demand of you that you stop talking about original sin.

JESUS What I was saying was….

PRIEST I don't know what you were saying, and I don't care. I repeat. Don't touch original sin. Don't touch it! Don't touch it!

RACHEL I can't understand why this listener is so irritated… Sir?

PRIEST Don't call me "sir". Call me "father". I am Father Jaime Lorin.

RACHEL Excuse me, Father, but… why don't you want us to touch on original sin in our interview?

PRIEST Don't you realize? If there is no original sin, why would Jesus Christ come into the world? There would no longer be any virgin or any star of Bethlehem. If there's no original sin, what did Jesus Christ come to redeem us from? There would no longer be any cross on Calvary. And if there's no longer any cross, there's no empty tomb. If there's no original sin, then why get baptized? There'd no longer be any baptism or masses. And if there are no masses, there's no longer any church. And if there's no longer any church, shit, then I'm done for. So that …

RACHEL So that what?

PRIEST So that … don't touch original sin!

RACHEL Whew! Jesus, what do you think of this tirade, I mean, this estimable opinion of Father Lorin?

JESUS Talking about parables, I just remembered one that I told, the one about the two houses, one built on rock and the other on sand. The rains came, the winds blew, and the house built on sand collapsed. The same thing will happen to these people who have built everything on a fable, on the story of original sin.

RACHEL [announcer's voice] Will our house also collapse? What have we built on sand or rock? Don't miss our interview tomorrow with Jesus Christ in this special coverage of Emisoras Latinas. This is Rachel Perez, reporting from Nazareth.

MUSIC

ANNOUNCER Another God is Possible. Exclusive interviews with Jesus Christ in his second coming to Earth. A production of María and José Ignacio López Vigil, with the support of the Syd Forum and Christian Aid.

INTERVIEW 60: BACKGROUND MATERIAL

The original myth of Genesis

The narrative of Genesis tells of how Adam and Eve were tempted by a serpent to disobey God by eating forbidden fruit and subsequently expelled from Paradise for this sin. It is at the beginning of the Bible used by Jews and Christians and appears also in the Koran of the Muslims. The three great

monotheistic religions have incorporated this myth of origins into their religious imagery, but they interpret the nature of that "original sin" in different ways.

Jesus never referred to this myth in his teaching, although he naturally knew it well. The Talmudic tradition (the oral tradition of Judaism, consisting of a collection of the theological debates of the rabbis) teaches that the consequences of that "primordial fault" are hard work, sickness and death. The idea that because of that fault all the descendents of Adam and Eve are born with sin is not part of Jewish doctrine.

The progressive currents within contemporary Judaism even interpret that "sin" in a positive light: they see in it the first human act of free will; they consider the acquisition of freedom to be part of the divine plan, since if there is consciousness of fault, then there is acknowledgement of responsibility. According to this perspective, the Genesis myth would be an elaborate allegory of humanity's passage from childhood to adulthood and so to autonomy.

If original sin is touched…

The Christian doctrine regarding original sin is not found in the texts of the gospels, and it finds practically no basis in any New Testament text, with the exception of some allusions made by Paul in his letters (Romans 5,12). The dogma of original sin was decreed in the fourth century at the Council of Carthage, and it was given precision at the Council of Trent, after the Protestant Reformation in the 16th century. Trent was one of the councils most concerned with doctrine in the whole history of the church.

The Council of Trent established that that sin is transmitted to all human being through generation, nor through imitation. That is to say, it is inherited. The doctrine of original sin had been solidified above all by the Manichean mind frame of Augustine of Hippo (4-5th century), who viewed human nature as riddled with sin and evil and who professed a profound repudiation of women – for him Eve was the one responsible for all evils since it was through her that sin entered the world.

It is truly incredible to think how much is based on this myth: all the Church's theology of salvation positing the death of Jesus Christ as "necessary", all its sacrificial theology, all its sacramental theology, all its negative vision of the world, all its repudiation of the body, of sexuality, of women. All such teachings are based on this narrative of Adam and Eve, on the dogmatic belief in original sin, a belief derived from an ancient Hebrew myth. Therefore, if someone "touches" original sin, if this idea is suppressed, if this dogma is questioned, if this belief is rejected, then everything is shaken and all the traditional theology begins to come undone. As Jesus explains to Rachel, recalling the parable of the two houses, one built on sand and the other built on rock (Matthew 7,24-27), nothing important would be lost in such a shake-up.

What the Catechism says

There are constant allusions to original sin in the Catholic Catechism, and enormous importance is given to the Genesis myth. For example, number 289 of the Catechism shows how this myth gives rise to many other beliefs (see underlined text): *Among all the Scriptural texts about creation, the first three chapters of Genesis occupy <u>a unique place</u>. … The inspired authors have placed them at the*

beginning of Scripture to express in their solemn language the truths of creation – its origin and its end in God, its order and goodness, the vocation of man, and finally the drama of sin and the hope of salvation. Read in the light of Christ, within the unity of Sacred Scripture and in the living Tradition of the Church, these texts remain <u>*the principal source*</u> *for catechesis on the mysteries of the "beginning": creation, fall, and promise of salvation.*

The illogical and toxic belief that this sin "is transmitted" from generation to generation is resolved in the Catechism by having recourse to "mystery". Thus we read in number 404 of the Catechism: *How did the sin of Adam become the sin of all his descendants? The whole human race is in Adam "as one body of one man" (*Thomas Aquinas*, De Malo,* 4,1*). By this "unity of the human race" all men are implicated in Adam's sin, as all are implicated in Christ's justice. Still, the transmission of original sin is a mystery that we cannot fully understand.*

For thousands of years women have been stigmatized on the basis of this perverse foundational myth of Adam and Eve. To the shame of the Catholic world, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, today Pope Benedict XVI, drew once again on this when he authored a document pompously titled a "Letter to the bishops of the Catholic Church on the collaboration of man and woman in the Church and in the world," a text which expresses an extremely obsolete vision of man, woman, the Church and the world.

Among Protestants, Evangelicals, and Muslims

While Catholic doctrine has remained permanently affixed to the myth of Adam and Eve as an explanation of the origin of human history and has made this Hebrew myth the basis of a sacrificial theology and a sacramental theology, many of the historical Protestant churches have been distancing themselves from this vision. Such is not the case, however, with the modern Pentecostal and Neo-Pentecostal churches, which have at the center of their whole theology a literal reading of the Bible and the certainty that we are born "evil" and steeped in sin.

Although the Koran narrates the story of Adam and Eve, Islam does not have any notion of "original sin". According to the Koran, responsibility for the original transgression was shared by both Adam and Eve, and it was adequately punished with their expulsion from Paradise. Islam explicitly rejects the idea that one person should pay for the sins or the errors of another. *Nobody shall bear the guilt of another* (Sura 17, verse 5). The idea of individual responsibility is central to Islam, and personal freedom is the basis by which God decides whether to punish or reward people.

The dogma of the Immaculate Conception

The dogma of the Immaculate Conception of Mary, meaning that Mary was free of original sin, was proclaimed by Pius XI on December 8, 1854, in the dogmatic bull "Ineffabilis Deus", in which he stated: *We declare, promulgate and define that the doctrine which holds that the Blessed Virgin Mary was preserved free from all stain of original sin from the first instant of her conception, by a singular grace and privilege of almighty God, in anticipation of the merits of Christ Jesus the Savior of the human race, is a revealed doctrine.*

In the judgment of Hans Küng, theologian and church historian, Pope Pius IX was “ a man emotionally unstable and devoid of any intellectual doubt; he showed symptoms characteristic of a psychopath” in his obsessive desire to strengthen the papacy and Marian doctrine, in order to give “emotional security” to the Catholic flock in a time of great historical changes. Among the changes was the theory of evolution, proposed by Charles Darwin in the same decade that the Pope proclaimed this dogma, the first in which the Pope sought to show himself “infallible”. According to Küng: *This is a doctrine about which we find not a single word in the Bible or in the Catholic tradition of the first millennium; it is a doctrine which makes no sense in light of the theory of evolution.*

Evil in the world

Many evils that we see and feel in the world we know – sickness and death, natural catastrophes, the negative impulses of human beings – are simply expressions of the limits proper to all vital processes, whether they be our own life, the life of our brain, the life of the planet earth or any other form of life. Attributing those evils to an offended supreme being – and to human beings who offended him and so inherited that “stain” – is a truly archaic, primitive religious conception.

There are also in the world we know many other evils – exploitation of labor, violence against women, abuse of power, uncontrolled ambition, avarice, wars, and torture – which do not derive from any inherited original sin either, but have their origin in the free choices of individual persons and in political and social systems freely developed by individual persons and human collectivities. They are avoidable evils that cause unnecessary suffering, and their suppression depends on human beings.

Among its many negative consequences, the doctrine of original sin as the cause of the world’s evil foments both insensitive irresponsibility in the powerful and fatalistic resignation in the powerless. Therefore the best thing is to “touch” that doctrine – shove it, oust it, eliminate it – so as to do away with all the false beliefs linked to it.

Interview 61
WHAT DOES JESUS SAVE US FROM?

RACHEL Yes, hurry it up, give me space. Do we have a signal now? Are we on the air? … Good morning, Jesus Christ.

JESUS [Yawning] Good morning, Rachel. Why are you so anxious?

RACHEL I'm anxious and you're still half asleep.

JESUS What happened is I spent the night talking with a family from here in Nazareth. They told me how difficult life is for them nowadays.

RACHEL Well, get wide awake, because your last comments about original sin have aroused some extremely strong reactions. From all the questions we've received, I pick out this one If there was no original sin, then why did you come into the world?

JESUS Well, I came into the world … because my mother brought me into it! Surely that's the case also with our friend who asked the question.

RACHEL But he's surely referring to redemption.

JESUS To what redemption?

RACHEL You are the Redeemer of the world, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

JESUS I'm a lamb, really? Listen, Rachel, there was a time when people thought that God, up there in heaven, got angry and vexed with us for what we were doing on earth. They thought he sent lightning bolts and floods, destroyed towers, and punished us with fire and brimstone. We thought we had to do something to calm God's anger.

RACHEL And how could it be calmed?

JESUS They say that some peoples went so far as to sacrifice human beings. Even our father Abraham thought that he had to sacrifice his son Isaac, but just as he was ready to thrust the knife into the boy, God stopped him.

RACHEL I imagine God is repulsed by human sacrifices.

JESUS He detests them. Later on, people thought that they could placate God's wrath by sacrificing animals, such as sheep, goats, doves. The temple of Jerusalem was a slaughterhouse; there was blood gushing out on every side.

RACHEL And was God pleased with that?

JESUS How could he be pleased with that? Tell me, Rachel, do you have a pet animal in your house?

RACHEL In my house? Well, my kids have a dog. They call him Mocho.

JESUS And if one day you got upset with your kids, would you be pacified by having them kill Mocho for you or perhaps slaughter the neighbor's cat?

RACHEL Gosh, don't talk like that.

JESUS Luckily, the prophets did talk like that. Hosea said God does not want sacrifices, but mercy. Isaiah said The sacrifice that is pleasing to God is breaking the yoke of injustice, sharing your bread, helping the orphan and the widow. God doesn't need blood, Rachel. God doesn't want blood.

RACHEL Not even your blood?

JESUS My blood?

RACHEL They've always taught us that your sacrifice on the cross was pleasing to God.

JESUS What you've just said really offends God. How is God going to be happy about innocent blood being shed? God is my father. He is also your father. How can a father want his little ones to be killed? How can he be thirsting for blood in order to calm his wrath? Such a God would be a monster worse than that Moloch who devoured his own children.

RACHEL Well, now let's see what our audience has to say … Hello?... Yes?

WOMAN Look, I am very confused about everything I hear on your program. I only want Jesus to clear up one thing for me. Did he come to save us? Yes or no?

RACHEL How do you answer that, Jesus?

JESUS Well, of course I did. I spoke about salvation. I preached salvation.

WOMAN Salvation from sin, … from our sins?

JESUS No, not from sin, because each person will give an account to God for what he or she has done, for the harm they have done to others, for the harm they have done to themselves….

WOMAN So what do you come to save us from?

JESUS From believing in a bloodthirsty God. In all truth I tell you God is love. And only love saves us.

RACHEL Did you hear that, my friend? Do you have another question? Can you hear me, dear? … I don't know if she hung up the phone or was just left speechless. Well, we have to take a commercial break now, and in a few minutes we'll continue with another burning topic, which will be a great surprise for those of you listening to us. From Nazareth this is Rachel Perez, reporting for Emisoras Latinas.

MUSIC

ANNOUNCER Another God is Possible. Exclusive interviews with Jesus Christ in his second coming to Earth. A production of María and José Ignacio López Vigil, with the support of the Syd Forum and Christian Aid.

INTERVIEW 61: BACKGROUND MATERIAL

Being saved among ourselves

The great Christian myth is the story of paradise: it is the story of a humanity separated from God and therefore evil, sinful, needing "salvation" in order to overcome that primeval rupture. The myth of paradise lost is complemented by the myth of paradise recovered, thanks to the salvation that Jesus offers us through his suffering and dying for us to pay off the original debt. But is all this mythology truly Christian? Is it based on the life and teachings of Jesus? What Jesus always taught and proposed, by his words and his actions, was the need to be saved among ourselves, by doing justice, practicing an efficacious love, and saving one another from sickness, marginalization, exclusion, shameful poverty, fear of an angry God …

The sacrificed lamb

Jesus was killed during the days of Passover, which was one of the Jewish people's traditional feasts. The heart of the Passover celebration was a supper where families came together and ate a lamb that had been sacrificed in the Temple of Jerusalem. The image of the Messiah as the "lamb of God" had its origin in prophetic texts such as Isaiah 53,7. That same image is developed in John's gospel, and it fascinated Paul, who was an obstinate proponent of a sacrificial theology (1 Corinthians 5,7). The author of the Apocalypse also makes abundant use of the symbol of the lamb.

The early Christian communities were persecuted to the point of shedding their blood in professing their faith. In their art, Jesus was often represented as a lamb that had been slaughtered or wounded in its side, but wearing a halo on its head. The image is still central to the eucharistic rite: *Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world…*

A theology drenched in blood

Most New Testament authors, and especially Paul, were heirs to the Jewish culture, in which God was placated and honored by the shedding of the blood of lambs and other sacrificed animals. They were also surrounded by the empire's pagan cults, in which animals were sacrificed to please the gods. They therefore understood the death of Jesus in terms of sacrifice: his blood redeemed humanity.

Right up to the present day that same sacrificial theology has great influence in traditional Christianity. It is expressed in Christian beliefs, devotions, and preaching, as well as in evangelical services and the liturgy of the Catholic mass. From every theological angle we are relentlessly reminded that Jesus' blood "was shed for us"; it is what "saved" us.

Nothing in the life of Jesus indicates that he felt himself to be a "lamb of God" carried to the slaughterhouse by the divine will. What is characteristic and original in the message of Jesus is his proclamation of the Kingdom of God and his joyous confidence that things will change on earth, that justice will reign, that there will no longer be blood or sweat or tears shed unjustly. In the parable of the vineyard and the vine-growers (Matthew 21,33-46), God does not send his son so that they will kill him, but so that the rebellious vine-growers will mend their ways.

As little appreciation as Jesus evidently had for bloody sacrifices, Christianity very soon betrayed him. Feminist theologian Ivone Gebara explains it thus: *The blood-drenched cross, which must have created in Christians an intense opposition to all unjust violence, also generated the false idea that suffering and sacrifice are necessary in order to draw close to God and be saved.*

Traditional theology, bathed in sacrificial blood, is not Christian, although it has pretended to be such for countless centuries and still pretends to be so.

There should never be blood

Jesus reminds Rachel of how the patriarch Abraham was on the verge of sacrificing his son Isaac. Marc-Alain Ouaknin, a rabbi who has developed a very original way of interpreting the scriptures, agrees with Jesus, that it was necessary for God to "stop" Abraham. He states: *The meaning of that "stopping" is clear: You shall not act as do all those around you. In the name of God, the supreme value, you are not going to sacrifice either your son or any other human being. The "revolution" of Abraham consists in introducing respect for the other, even if this is "against" the word of God. What is revolutionary in this story is that the sacrifice of Isaac was not carried out. If this message is well understood, it means: there should never be blood and violence among human beings because of God.*

How to escape from this theology

The theology of salvation by sacrifice that has its origins principally in the writings of Paul is a consequence of a "dualistic" mentality. Such theology consists in thinking that the world is a "vale of tears", that we humans are evil sinners who were born in sin, and that we therefore need "to be saved" from the world and from our sins.

This dualism is very present in the Bible and in the Aristotelian thinking which had much influence on Christian theology. Such a dualistic vision affects all our knowledge and creates an abyss between God and the world. And in order to cross that abyss, people are desperately in need of sacrifices, offerings, mediators, sacred places, sacred rites, sacred moments, and, most definitely, a Savior. In this dualistic perspective, God reigns above everything, but does not dwell in anything. He is the Creator but does not reside in his Creation.

How are we to escape from this dualism? For Willigis Jäger, a Benedictine monk and Zen Buddhist master, we can escape by abandoning institutionalized religion and promoting true spirituality. He states: *Acrobatic skating and hang gliding have much of the same religiosity that there is in a divine cult. Our body is more intimate to our essential nature than is our reason. The body encompasses a religiosity which is lacking in our ecclesial religious culture. We Christians have forgotten the spiritual energy of the body. I repeat often a statement that expresses the basis of the spirituality I try to transmit: Religion is our life, and the process of life is our true religion. God does not want to be adored; he wants to be lived.*

Jäger recognizes, however, that *religiosity has different levels, and humanity will remain for a long time at a religious level where salvation can be imagined only in terms of being redeemed by a redeemer.*

Savior of whom? from what?

The feminist theologian Ivone Gebara reflects boldly on the "salvation" worked by Jesus when she states: *For the Christian community Jesus is the symbol of its dreams, the symbol of what it most intensely desires for humankind and for the earth. These aspirations are modified by the community of Jesus' followers in different contexts and at different moments of human history. Consequently, it might be said that Jesus is not the savior of all humanity in the traditional, triumphalist sense that has characterized Christian churches. He is not the powerful Son of God who dies on the cross and is transformed into the King who morally dominates the different cultures. He is simply the symbol of the fragile fraternity and the justice that we are seeking. …*

He does not come to us because of a "higher will" that sent him. He comes from down here, from this earth, from this body, from the evolution of the past and of today. … As an individual person, Jesus is not superior to any other human being. He is from the same earth, from the same corporeal reality of which we all are made. However, given his moral qualities, given his sensitivity and his openness to others, he succeeded in somehow representing the perfection of our dreams, the ideal realization of our desires. The difference is not metaphysical or ontological; it is ethical and esthetic, because it is located in the human quality of his being, in the beauty of the attitudes that he was able to let flow from himself and from others. Jesus does not save us by being himself the foundation of hierarchical power, but by being the foundation of a new model of fraternal and sororal power, which inspires all of us who profess that we belong to his tradition.

Interview 62
TRUE GOD AND TRUE MAN?

RACHEL The mobile unit of Emisoras Latinas moves today to the top of Mount Tabor. Below us lies Galilee in all its green splendor. Good day, Jesus. We understand that this is the place where you were transfigured before your disciples.

JESUS Good day, Rachel. Shalom!

RACHEL Even though I have a thousand questions waiting to be answered, I can't refrain from asking the one that our audience is most anxious about. Who are you?

JESUS Me? … I am Jesus.

RACHEL Some have claimed that you came from another planet, that you're an extraterrestrial.

JESUS Extraterrestrial?

RACHEL It's not what I say, but writers like J. J. Benitez, who wrote about the Trojan horse. He says that at the moment of your death a flying saucer came to get you and returned you to the galaxy you had come from.

JESUS In my time also they were telling such stories, like the one about Noah's Ark. But even the children knew that that's what they were, stories. I was born in this land we are now walking on. I didn't come from any star.

RACHEL In earlier interviews you told us details of your birth, your parents…. But, let's be honest, you still haven't made clear to us your true identity. Who are you, Jesus Christ?

JESUS Once I asked James and John and Peter that same question "Who do people say that I am?" They answered, "Well, some say the prophet Elias, others the prophet Jeremiah, …" "And what about you?" I asked them. "You are the Messiah," they told me, "the one who is going to free our people."

RACHEL Did you consider yourself to be the awaited Messiah?

JESUS I felt a fire in my heart. My words burned within me and piled up in my mouth. When I went to be baptized by John in the Jordan River, I had no idea of where God would lead me.

RACHEL But at that age you already knew what your vocation was, your divine mission. Or didn't you?

JESUS How was I going to know that, Rachel? People find the right path only by walking along it.

RACHEL But when you stood before Caiphas, in the Sanhedrin, you certainly had a clear picture then, isn't that right?

JESUS Picture?

RACHEL Excuse the expression, … I mean, when Caiphas interrogated you, you admitted you were the Messiah. Or didn't you?

JESUS I told him that yes, the Kingdom of God had arrived.

RACHEL But Caiphas didn't speak only of the Messiah. He asked you if you were the Son of God, and you told him you were.

JESUS Of course, Rachel, we are all children of God. You also are a daughter of God. All your listeners are children of God.

RACHEL I'm referring to your divine nature, and don't think you're going to escape from me this time. I even have the date here. In the Council of Chalcedon, in the year 451, you were defined.

JESUS What do you mean I was defined?

RACHEL You are one person with two natures, a divine nature and a human nature.

JESUS And what does that mean?

RACHEL I'll give you an example. You, as a man, did not know anything about Einstein's theory of relativity, but as God you did, because God knows everything.

JESUS How strange, … because … how can somebody know something and not know it at the same time?

RACHEL Another example you as a man did not know that Judas was going to betray you, but as God you already knew it.

JESUS If I had known that about Judas, I can assure you that things would have turned out very differently. We would have returned to Galilee immediately.

RACHEL Perhaps I'm not expressing myself well, because I'm a reporter, not a theologian. What I mean to say is that …

JESUS Leave all that confusion for another moment, Rachel, and right now just look at this valley. Breathe in that air.

RACHEL Yes, I breathe it in, but … What about you, our listener friends, are you satisfied? I still am not. So I'll just have to keep asking him about….

JESUS Later, Rachel. Now, just let yourself be transfigured by this beauty, and then you'll to understand things much, much better.

RACHEL Okay, then, … From Mount Tabor and contemplating a truly marvelous landscape, this is Rachel Perez, of Emisoras Latinas.

MUSIC

ANNOUNCER Another God is Possible. Exclusive interviews with Jesus Christ in his second coming to Earth. A production of María and José Ignacio López Vigil, with the support of the Syd Forum and Christian Aid.

INTERVIEW 62: BACKGROUND MATERIAL

An evolving consciousness

Like all human beings, Jesus grew not only in age, but also in consciousness. He learned from life and from the realities around him. When, speaking once in the synagogue of Nazareth, he applied to himself the Isaian text, *The Spirit is upon me,* he took an important step in developing his own consciousness of who he was. It was a way of acknowledging himself to be a prophet, following in the tradition of all the prophets who had preceded him. As a prophet, Jesus spoke out and acted boldly, feeling himself to be an heir of Israel's tradition. As a prophet he consolidated his leadership in the movement that gradually formed around him.

After Jesus died and then appeared as risen to his disciples, the early church piled on him many titles to describe his mission: "Lord", "Son of God", "Christ". The history recounted in the gospels, however, allows us to see that the title by which Jesus was unanimously acclaimed by his disciples and by the people was that of "prophet".

The prophet is defined over against the institution. We should not consider Jesus to have been a theologian or a religious teacher within the institution, even if more radical than others. He could never have been such because he lacked what the formal theological studies that were required of teachers of his time. The formation of the religious teachers was rigorous; it began in childhood and lasted many years. When Jesus was addressed as "rabbi" (teacher), he was being accorded the treatment that in his time was usual as an expression of respect; it should not be understood as indicating that he was traditional teacher of theology. Rather, Jesus was judged by the teachers of the Law as being guilty of teaching without proper authorization.

"I am the truth"

Mystical experience allows people to experience what we might call “the democracy of the divine”, something very akin to Jesus’ novel message. It allows people to experience themselves as God and to claim, “I am God”. Such a feeling is not necessarily born of arrogance or madness; it arises from a depth of consciousness where the “I” and the “You” dissolve, and a person experiences complete identification with the All, with the One, with the Ultimate Reality, with what we call God.

In her book *The Harem in the West,* Moroccan writer Fatema Mernisi relates an exceptional story that illustrates how such religious experience can scandalize others, in this case in the context of Sufism, a mystical current within Islam.

In the year 915 the Abbasid police arrested Hallaj, a well-known Sufi, for proclaiming publicly in the streets of Baghdad something that he should have kept secret: “I am the Truth.” Since “Truth” is one of the names of God, Hallaj was declared a heretic. Islam insists on a strict separation of the divine and the human, but Hallaj believed that if you concentrated on loving God in your human condition, you could be fused with the very object of your love, namely, divinity itself. In fact, Hallaj declared himself to be made in the image and likeness of God, a claim which caused confusion for the Abbasid police, since arresting him would be tantamount to assaulting God himself. Hallaj was burned to death in March, 922. He also alarmed the Abbasid police with another of his famous sayings: “I am the one whom I loved, and the one I loved is I myself.”

Are these sayings not reminiscent of many of the words attributed to Jesus in John’s gospel, a text which had its origins in mystical Gnostic communities? A mistake has been made, however, in allowing such expressions of human consciousness to be petrified into doctrines and dogmas which people are obliged to believe in.

The “divinity” of Jesus

The Spanish theologian José Arregui, in his text “Jesus in the Interreligious Dialogue: Perspectives”, reflects on the current efforts in theology to reinterpret Jesus’ “divinity” in such a way as to preserve the core of the Christian confession without letting the “divinity” become an obstacle for interreligious dialogue. Arregui recalls that the French Catholic theologian Charles Perrot, in his book “Jesus, Christ and Lord of the First Christians” (Paris, 1997), gave a rigorous demonstration of the following points:

1) In the New Testament Jesus is considered “divine” in several sure texts (Hebrews 1,8; John 1,1 and 20,28) and other doubtful ones (Romans 9,5; John 1,18; Titus 2,13; 1 John 5,20; 2 Peter 1,1), but he is never identified as God himself.

2) The New Testament affirmations concerning Jesus’ “divinity” are analogous to Jewish affirmations concerning the “divinity” of other biblical figures and concepts (Moses, Melchisidech, Job, the Son of Man, the Angels, the Torah, Wisdom, etc.).

3) The “divinization” of Jesus first took place in the genre of liturgical hymns.

4) Such “divinization” was considered credible in the philosophical and religious setting of Hellenism.

On the basis of all this Arregui states: *Other scholars analyze how theologians arrived at the Nicean definition of 325 ("consubstantial with the Father") and the Chalcedonian definition of 451 ("two natures and one person"). The history of the doctrines starts out from Judeo-Christian and Hellenistic thought and follows a highly complex and hazardous course, one strewn with mistaken concepts and political interests. The scholars consequently recognize the need to reinterpret these council formulas, taking into account their origins and our own present situation.*

The broth and the bull

In his book *Believing in Liberty* German theologian Eugen Drewermann shows conclusively how difficult it is for dogmatic theology to explain adequately the greatness and the originality of Jesus' message concerning his own experience of God and the experience of God he wanted to share with the people in the movement he led.

In another of his books, *Immediate God*, Drewermann uses a homely comparison to contrast the warm vitality of Jesus with the cold rigidity of dogmas and with the sterility of many preachers' efforts to "inject new life" and "find new interpretations" for the contrived Christian dogmas proclaimed centuries ago:

The irrationality of dogmas, to speak in that way, consists in wanting to set down in a fixed formula that inexpressible something which one day made possible a wholly new human experience, one that came as a complete surprise. Let me describe it with an image: the task of producing dogmas is like the process which transforms a living bull into a cube for making beef broth. Trying to shine light on the experience that gave rise to those dogmas is not at all an easy task; it might even be impossible. Aside from the fact that a lot of water is needed to make the beef broth, any attempt to turn the broth back into the live bull is impossible. It may be that a good broth refreshes the body, but if we want to see a live bull, we should not busy ourselves with making a broth. It would be better for us to go out into the fields in search of a bull.

The Christological dogmas removed the flavor of Jesus

Brazilian Catholic theologian Ivone Gebara also questions the abstruse Christological dogmas, and she expresses similar ideas in her book, *Jesus from an Eco-Feminist Perspective* :

The dogmatic Christology that comes to us from Nicea and Chalcedon, along with all the later "refinements", took away much of the savory richness of Jesus' words and actions, which were at times irreverent, surprising, disconcerting, bold, or affectionate. His conversations beside a well, the meals he shared, his gentle gestures, his decrying of injustices, his gratuitousness, the affection he gave and received – all these dogmatic theology has reduced to "organized reason," "systematic theory," "science".

In effect, dogmatics has chained and imprisoned what was originally an invitation to freedom, what was originally poetry. Worse still, it has stationed at the doors of the "prison" armed guards dressed as priests, so that nobody could escape from lockup or think in a different manner. Dogmatics has established authorized teachers to declare the acceptable truths about Jesus, thereby killing off all the creativity of those gratuitous moments, informal gatherings, and friendly conversations that take

place in the kitchen, along the roadway, or on the riverbank. Dogmatics, seen from a radical perspective, has reduced brotherly and sisterly "reasonableness" to hierarchical obedience; it has limited "the many ways" of truth to one sole road; and it has forced the many-splendored discourses of love into a single mode of expression. And it has constantly created fear: fear of disobedience, fear of thinking incorrectly, fear of not reproducing the acceptable word or the precisely formulated doctrine, fear of the authentic tradition that proceeds from Jesus himself.

Interview 63
MOST HOLY TRINITY?

RACHEL We continue our transmission here from Mount Tabor. In the last interview, Jesus, you didn't seem very excited about the privilege of having two natures, one human and the other divine, in your single person.

JESUS It's not that, Rachel. I just didn't understand very well what you were talking about.

RACHEL Please don't go on again about how all human beings are created in the image and likeness of God. That much we already know. But you … you called yourself the very Son of God.

JESUS I always called myself a son of man. I am a man, Rachel. A true man.

RACHEL But also a true God. You… you are God.

JESUS Stop, Rachel. I'm horrified by what you say. Only God is God.

RACHEL I think the time has come to speak clearly. I'm referring to the Most Holy Trinity. That's what I want to talk about. That's what our audience wants to hear about, the Most Holy Trinity.

JESUS Well, let's talk then.

RACHEL That dogma was established at the Council of Nicea God is three persons and one nature. God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. Is that the case or not?

JESUS Are you talking about three gods?

RACHEL I'm talking to you about three natures and just one person. No, no, the opposite three persons and just one nature. The thing is, these topics are complicated, you understand. I'm speaking about three divine persons.

JESUS And who are those three persons?

RACHEL Well, you are one of them.

JESUS And the other two?

RACHEL The Father and the Paraclete.

JESUS Who is the Paraclete?

RACHEL The Holy Spirit. There's a father, a son, and a paraclete. That's the divine family.

JESUS A family just made up of males?

RACHEL Keep the jokes for later, please. I ask you again to be serious, because this subject is crucial. This is the dogma of all dogmas.

JESUS Okay, then, tell me again who I am.

RACHEL You turn out to be the second person of the single divine nature, although, as you will recall, you have two natures in your single person. Do you get it now?

JESUS No.

RACHEL Light of light, true God of true God, begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father.

JESUS But Rachel, how can I be one person with two natures and also one nature with three persons?

RACHEL The solution for all that is the hypostatic union. Three who are not three, but one. And one that is not one, but two.

JESUS Believe me, I'm trying hard to follow you, but it sounds like gibberish to me. I don't understand a thing.

RACHEL Well, that's the way divine mysteries are.

JESUS Or maybe that's the way human entanglements are. Because my father and my mother taught me, from the time I was boy, that God is One. And that nobody has ever seen his face.

RACHEL There are whole libraries full of books explaining the dogma of the Holy Trinity. There are triangles with the divine eye, sermons, paintings, cathedrals,… and now you come and tell us…

GIRL Hey, are you people from here?

JESUS Hello, little girl. What's your name?

GIRL Maryam.

JESUS What a pretty name, like my mother's. Come on, stay here with us. What would you like?

GIRL An ice cream!

JESUS Not *an* ice cream, we're going to buy "three" ice creams. Look here, Rachel, just talk with this girl. The children are the ones who know most about God. God does not reveal himself to the wise and to the theologians.

RACHEL What about all that other stuff?

JESUS All that other stuff is not so important. Let's go, Maryam. Take that expression off your face, Rachel. Nature is here, before our eyes. And the three persons are us you, me, … and Maryam!

RACHEL Well…, well…, then the three of us will sign off for today. Until the next time. From Mount Tabor, this is Emisoras Latinas.

MUSIC

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INTERVIEW 63: BACKGROUND MATERIAL

Son of man and true man

Jesus called himself the "Son of man", an expression that appears in the prophet Daniel (7,13) and in Aramaic means simply "human being".

Jesus' companions saw in him a true man, a passionate prophet convinced of what he was saying. Because of his compelling discourse and his revolutionary attitudes, they sometimes identified him with the long-awaited Messiah who was going to liberate the people. The basic nucleus of the gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke is faithful to this tradition, which is the most primitive and authentic one about Jesus.

The last gospel, attributed to John, and the letters of Paul, which were written in a Hellenistic cultural context, transformed Jesus of Nazareth into Jesus Christ, the celestial King, the Lord (*Kyrios*), the Son of God. Such honorific titles provided the basis for the later formulation of dogmas which defined who Jesus was, but they did so using philosophical molds that were alien to Jewish culture. Gradually Jesus was mythified and divinized in formulations that became ever more abstract and removed from historical reality. These dogmatic formulations in the early Christian centuries provoked many debates and even bloodshed among Christians, since those deemed "heretics" were cruelly persecuted for proposing different ways of expressing the dogmas. No doubt the person who would be most scandalized by all this would be Jesus, the Jew.

The central dogma provoked wars

The Trinity is the central dogma of Catholic and Orthodox Christianity and of some Protestant denominations. It was declared a dogma of faith in the year 325 at the Council of Nicea. Both before and after this Council, attempts to formulate this dogma gave rise to innumerable heresies and schisms, and even wars. The definition of the Council of Nicea stated that the Son was "consubstantial" with the Father, a formula that generated years of controversy, until that dogma of Nicea was reaffirmed at the Council of Constantinople in the year 381.

Much later, in 1054, the Eastern Schism was provoked by debate about the "procession" of the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit. The Church of Constantinople separated from that of Rome, producing what we know today as the "Orthodox" Christians, who live mostly in Eastern Europe and the Middle East. The theologians of Constantinople claimed that the Holy Spirit proceeded only from the Father, while those of Rome held that the Holy Spirit proceeded from the Father and the Son. *Credo in Spiritum Sanctum qui ex Patre Filioque procedit.* That little word "Filioque" ("and from the Son"), which is part of the trinitarian dogma, gave rise to a tremendous conflict, which ended up with a definitive divorce between the church of the East and that of the West: Constantinople separated from Rome. Naturally, it was not only ideology and theology that lay behind these conflicts; there were also many political interests involving dominion over vast territories.

"Explaining and clarifying" the dogma

In its treatment of the dogma of the Trinity, the Catholic Encyclopedia cites Pope Gregory the Great, who tried to explain this belief after it was defined in the Councils. He stated: *Therefore, there is nothing created, nothing subject to anything else in the Trinity; there is nothing that has been added, as if something previously non-existing were later to become part of the Trinity; the Father has never been without the Son, nor the Son without the Holy Spirit; and that same Trinity is immutable and inalterable forever.* As can be seen, the "explanations" bordered on the incomprehensible.

Another abstruse "explanation" has more recently been offered about the matter debated and resolved in the three Councils that followed Nicea and Constantinople, councils that were obsessive about trying to fit Jesus' personality into the metaphysics of the epoch. This "clarification" is proposed by the Catholic theologian G. Iammarrone, who states:

*Three ecumenical councils, which were convoked to settle the controversies arising among these schools, marked the stages on the way to a correct understanding of the mystery of Christ's unity. I present here the substance of their interventions. The Council of Ephesus (431) defined the following: in Jesus Christ there is a unity of the divine and the human "according to hypostasis" (*kathypostasin*) and not only by the pure will, benevolence or assumption of the prosopon (this text shows that hypostasis and prosopon still do not have the same meaning).*

The Council of Chalcedon (451) affirmed that in the incarnate Word the divine nature and the human nature, united by not fused, "concur" in the constitution of the single hypostasis or person (prosopon) – the two terms are now equivalent. Nevertheless, the Council did not state explicitly which hypostasis it was.

The Second Council of Constantinople (553) made it clear that the union of the two natures in Christ is achieved "according to the hypostasis" (kathypostasin) *of the divine Word, or "by synthesis"* (kata

synthesin), *so that from the moment of the incarnation there was in Jesus Christ a single hypostasis/person (subject,* autos), *of both the divine nature and the human nature, which remains whole and distinct from the divine in the "synthesis" or "composition". Present in this formulation are: a) a concept of an integral, individual human nature, one that is not hypostasis/person, but is hypostasized/personified by and in the same hypostasis/divine person of the Word (an an-hypostatic human nature); and b) a concept of hypostasis/person which has subsistence as a constitutive element. This vision of the union of divinity and humanity in Christ is what has been constantly transmitted in the Church up to the present day, both in the documents of the Magisterium and in the theological Tradition.*

Do that make it perfectly clear?

Other trinities in other religions

The idea of a divine trinity is present in some ancient religions. In ancient Egypt, three thousand years before Jesus, the religious tradition of Memphis spoke of Pta, the creator; Sejmet, his wife; and Nefertem, their son. The tradition of Thebes proposed for adoration Amon, the creator; Mut, his wife; and Jonsu, their son. In Egypt the family bonds among the father god Osiris, his wife Isis, and their son Horus were the theological background for the succession of the pharaohs. In Babylon and Chaldea three masculine divinities (Bel, Hea, and Anu) were adored, as well as a feminine deity, Beltis, who was virgin and mother. The primitive Hellenic trinity was formed by the sky god Uranus, the earth goddess Gaia, and the creative and procreative force, Eros. There is also a trinity in Hinduism: Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva.

The ultimate origin of the dogma of the Trinity can be understood from this perspective: it is a totally patriarchal, exclusively masculine variant of the family triad archetypical of many ancient religions: father, mother, son. In Judaism there was no such triad – it was pure monotheism. In Christianity the triad reemerged, but masculinized. That is the way the Trinity has been represented for centuries in countless sculptures and paintings, starting from the famous icon of Andrei Rublev. Outstanding among the portrayals that propose "an all-male family" is the oil painting of Andrés López (1780), which is kept in the Andrés Blastein virtual museum, a website that displays master works of colonial and modern Mexican artists. Viewing the painting on the Internet turns out to be quite revealing. Often the plastic arts have represented the "third person", called the Holy Spirit or the Paraclete (Greek for "advocate" or "comforter"), in the form of a dove, without specifying the bird's sex.

Like Superman

Jesus was a man like everybody else. He believed, with passion and conviction, that all human beings are sons and daughters of God. For that reason he called himself the "son of God" and allowed others to call him that. That personal sentiment of Jesus produced a doctrine and later a dogma of faith, which requires all Christians to believe that Jesus is God in person, the second person of God's one and only nature.

This abstract idea, poured into philosophical molds quite foreign to our present-day mentality, is usually interpreted in a way that makes Jesus a God "disguised as a man", something similar to what the myth of Superman has offered to children and adults since 1938. This comic-book creation of

Joseph Shuster and Jerry Siegel portrays a super-powerful hero, who is capable of flying and performing “miracles”, but who hides behind the mild-mannered appearance of Clark Kent, an ordinary office worker. The Vatican today is actively promoting an image of Jesus painted by the Polish nun Faustina Kowalska; it portrays Jesus with multi-colored rays shining forth from his chest, a clear visual reinforcement of the idea of Jesus as Superman.

The god of the turtles

The Greek historian Xenophon used to say, five centuries before Jesus was dogmatically defined: *If turtles were to make a representation of God, they would paint him as a turtle.* When we say that in God there are three “persons”, we use a concept that is completely western. In contrast, the Arabic and Chinese languages, as well as many others, have no word meaning “person”. Nevertheless, this concept is at the center of Christian dogmatics, the patrimony of a church which imagines itself to be universal and, even more pretentiously, claims that it is the only true church. This is an obvious demonstration of the highly contingent nature of the words we use to refer to God, to Reality, to Mystery -- none of which can be captured by any human words.

Interview 64
THE BODY AND BLOOD OF CHRIST?

RACHEL The microphones of Emisoras Latinas have returned to Jerusalem, and they are today transmitting from the Cenacle, the place where the marvelous event of Holy Thursday occurred. With us again is Jesus Christ, the protagonist of that memorable night. Jesus, in this very chamber you celebrated the Last Supper and the First Mass.

JESUS Well, what we did was eat the Passover meal together. We used to do that every year, with the full moon of spring. The Passover is the great feast of my people; it commemorates the Exodus, when Moses liberated the slaves from the pharaoh.

RACHEL Yes, but that Passover was special. Let's review what exactly happened. Everybody was together for the night meal. You took the bread and said, "Eat it, for this is my body." Afterwards you took the cup of wine and said, "Drink it, for this is my blood." Those are perhaps the most sacred words of all the history of humanity. Is that how it went?

JESUS Well, I pronounced a blessing over the bread and the wine. I don't remember the exact works, but … I'm not sure where you're going with all this.

RACHEL To transubstantiation. When you pronounced those magic words, I mean mysterious words, then God was present in that bread. Is that true or not?

JESUS Yes, God was present in that bread.

RACHEL I'm delighted to hear it. I almost thought you were going to toss out another dogma.

JESUS But why are you so amazed, Rachel? In God we live and move and have our being. Don't you know that already? Lift up a stone, and God is there. Split a piece of wood, and there you'll find God.

RACHEL Wait just one moment. Don't try to escape by confusing us. All our listeners know that you consecrated bread and wine on that night.

JESUS Bread and wine and oil are already sacred. The food with which we nourish ourselves is a gift of God, and therefore it's sacred. What else are you referring to?

RACHEL I'm referring to transubstantiation, which means that by your words the bread ceased to be bread and the wine ceased to be wine.

JESUS But how is bread going to stop being bread and wine wine?

RACHEL The appearances remained, but the substance changed. In that bread was your body, in that wine was your blood, your very self, Jesus Christ, transubstantiated.

JESUS You're talking a lot of craziness, Rachel! I was seated there in the middle of everybody. How could I be changed at the same time into a piece of bread or a cup of wine? What kind of trick would that be? Not even a magician could do that!

RACHEL Tell me, what was in that cup that you gave your disciples to drink? Wasn't it your blood?

JESUS My people never drink the blood of any animal, much less that of a person. What you're telling me is something … horrendous.

RACHEL Well, then, what did you do on that Holy Thursday?

JESUS I spoke about unity, about community. Then we shared out the bread. I toasted with a cup of wine, and then all of us drank from it, as was the custom.

RACHEL You told them to do that in memory of you.

JESUS Yes, that's true. I was afraid that they'd arrest me soon, so I told them let's form an alliance. Whatever happens, let's stay united, like the grains of wheat on the stalk, like the grapes in the bunch. Even if I'm not here, meet together among yourselves to remember your commitment to the Kingdom of God.

RACHEL Well, now, let's see if we're on the same page. That night you did not institute the sacrament of the eucharist?

JESUS No.

RACHEL And when a priest repeats the words they claim you spoke that night, what happens with the bread and the wine?

JESUS Nothing. Because … it already happened.

RACHEL What do you mean, it already happened? No miracle takes place?

JESUS The miracle is not in the bread or in the wine, Rachel. The miracle is in the community. When a group of men and women who love one another and defend justice come together and give thanks to God and recall my words, there is God in the midst of them.

RACHEL And here we are, in the midst of our radio audience and with too many questions unanswered. We'll take a pause and be back with you soon. Rachel Perez, Emisoras Latinas, Jerusalem.

MUSIC

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INTERVIEW 64: BACKGROUND MATERIAL

The last supper during the feast of Passover

The feast of Passover was the most solemn feast of the people of Israel. It was during the days of that feast that Jesus was apprehended and murdered. Passover was celebrated during the first month of the Jewish calendar, the month of Nisan, which in our calendar would run roughly from mid-March to mid-April. The feast lasted seven days, but the 14th-15th of Nisan was considered the feast proper, for it was when people ate the paschal meal together. For Jesus that year this meal was to be his "last supper".

It was a Jewish custom that the person who presided at meals, generally the father of the family, would break the bread and give a piece to each person there. He would then do the same with the wine: he would bless the common cup, which was then passed from hand to hand so that all could drink from it. Those practices were neither exceptional nor "mysterious"; they were everyday customs. All those who had supper with Jesus on Passover night had been familiar with these customs since childhood. Not only were the gestures familiar to everybody, but it was understood that all who ate the bread and drank the wine would share in the blessing that had been pronounced over them. Like other eastern peoples, the Israelites believed that taking meals together united people into a community. Eating at the same table linked people together in a special way and was the sign of a fraternity which would last long after the meal was over.

Where is God?

Jesus reminds Rachel that God is everywhere and exists in every thing. God is the very heart of all we see and touch. God is present in all the loaves of bread and all the cups of wine. He reminds her of this with the phrase: *Lift up a stone, and God is there. Split a piece of wood, and there you'll find God.* This saying is attributed to Jesus in the apocryphal Gospel of Thomas.

Drinking blood: a strict prohibition

The text in John's gospel which explicitly puts in the mouth of Jesus the command to "eat his flesh" and "drink his blood" (6,52-57) is something totally alien to Jewish culture, which prohibited imbibing the blood of any living thing (Genesis 9,4; Deuteronomy 12,16). For that reason the very idea would have been repugnant for Jesus, perhaps even horrifying and repulsive. John's gospel is very different in style from the gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke and was written many years after them. John's gospel was addressed to communities of Hellenistic culture and Gnostic tendencies. For such communities the pagan ceremonies of eating "the body and the blood" of the gods had great religious meaning.

The dogma of transubstantiation

The doctrine of the Eucharist was defined at the Council of Trent (1545-1564), when the authority of the Catholic Church proclaimed: *If anyone should say that in the mass there is not a real and true sacrifice being offered, let him be anathema [excommunicated]. If anyone should say that by the words, "Do this in memory of me," Christ did not consecrate the apostles as priests or did not command the apostles and other priests to offer his own body and his own blood, let him be anathema. If anyone should say that the sacrifice of the mass is only an act of praise or thanksgiving, or that it is merely a commemoration of the sacrifice consummated on the cross but is not propitiatory, let him be anathema.*

The term "anathema" was a kind of "curse", used by the ecclesiastical hierarchy to disqualify all those who did not think or believe as they did. When an "anathema" was dictated against someone, the person was expelled from the community (excommunicated) and separated from religious society as someone "cursed" by God.

A doctrine on the defensive

Transubstantiation is a Catholic doctrine that originally emerged as a defensive "ideological weapon" against spiritual groups like the Cathars or Albigensians, which arose in the 12th century and were cruelly persecuted by Rome. These groups attacked the ecclesiastical hierarchy, the powers of priests, and the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist.

The doctrine of transubstantiation was reaffirmed by the Council of Trent in the 16th century, but now as a defense against Protestant reformers who did not accept the doctrine in the same sense as Rome. The Eastern Orthodox Christians, meanwhile, continued understand transubstantiation in the traditional sense.

Transubstantiation, according to the Council of Trent, consists in the *marvelous and exceptional conversion of all the substance of the bread into the body of Christ and all the substance of the wine into his blood, so that only the species of bread and wine remain – understanding "species" here as referring to the "accidents" of bread and wine: color, taste, quantity, etc.* The dogma holds that under the consecrated species of bread and wine, *Christ himself, alive and glorious, is present in a true, real and substantial manner, with his Body, his Blood, his soul and his divinity.*

"Do not doubt whether this is true"

According to the official doctrine, the transformation that takes places in the bread and wine is called "consecration" and can only be performed by priests using the precise words established by Christ during the first eucharistic celebration. Two philosophical terms are employed to help understand the doctrine of substantiation: "substance" and "accidents". Substance is what makes a thing be what it is, and accidents are the non-essential properties that can be perceived by the senses. According to the official doctrine, any piece of the consecrated bread, as tiny as it might be, contains the whole Christ, and likewise every drop of consecrated wine contains the whole Christ.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church states: *That in this sacrament are the true Body of Christ and his true Blood is something that "cannot be apprehended by the senses," says St. Thomas, "but only*

by faith, which relies on divine authority." For this reason, in a commentary on Luke 22:19 ("This is my body which is given for you."), St. Cyril says: "Do not doubt whether this is true, but rather receive the words of the Savior in faith, for since he is the truth, he cannot lie."

A scandalous devotion

The practice of offering ritual sacrifices in order to win God's good-will was rejected by Jesus, who like the prophets of Israel, taught that relations of justice and mercy among human beings are the only thing that pleases God. In this sense, it seems quite scandalous that the Catholic Church continues to interpret even today, as it has done for centuries, the "mystery" of the Eucharist from a materialist, magical perspective, according to which the celebration of the Eucharist, the sharing of one bread among brothers and sisters, is considered a "sacrifice agreeable to God". The rite of the mass and the liturgical texts are full of sacrificial images that would be surprising and repugnant to Jesus, in whose memory this rite is celebrated.

Interview 65
SHARING THE BREAD?

RACHEL We continue our broadcast here in the Church of the Cenacle, and by cellphone we are receiving quite a few messages. Some people congratulate us, others are indignant. A lot of questions are also arriving by way of our studios. A short while ago, Jesus, while we were off mike, you were making a somewhat ironic commentary. Would you mind repeating it?

JESUS What I was saying, Rachel, is that if I had suspected what a hullabaloo was going to raised about what we ate during that final meal, we'd have done better to go without food that night!

RACHEL Jokes aside, you referred before to Saint Paul and a situation that occurred in the community of … I think you said it was Corinth. What happened exactly?

JESUS I wasn't there, because I had left already. But they told me about it.

RACHEL And what did they tell you that left such an impression?

JESUS Well, it's something happened that in a city called Corinth, and I'm not even sure where that is. It seems the people there used to get together to give thanks to God. And while some of them were eating to their heart's content, others were practically starving. Paul took them to task, and quite rightly. What kind of a community is it where rich people are feasting and poor people are starving? What kind of a Passover could Moses and the pharaoh celebrate together, the oppressed alongside the oppressors?

RACHEL Well, it might be better for you not to visit some Christian churches, because you'd be in for a big surprise. The front-row seats are for the authorities, the military officials, the richest families; they put the whites up front, the blacks behind; the whites up front, the Indians in back.

JESUS They do that?

RACHEL Worse still, they give the consecrated bread to dictators, murderers and torturers, and they deny it to women simply because they're divorced.

JESUS They really do that?

RACHEL If you only knew…

JESUS Rachel, you were talking before about "substance". It's not the substance of the bread that needs to change, it's the substance of the heart. We need a new heart, capable of loving and sharing.

RACHEL But tell me something, Jesus if you did not institute the Eucharist that Holy Thursday, then what are priests doing in your name when they celebrate mass?

JESUS I imagine that they're proclaiming the good news to the poor. That is what I want them to do in memory of me.

RACHEL And what about those magic words, I mean, those *mysterious* words which the priests say, so that God will come down from heaven, so that he will land on the altar and hide himself in the host and then in the tabernacle?

JESUS You're an intelligent person, Rachel. God has given you a mind and a heart, and he has given the same to the listeners of your radio station as well. Do you think that God, who cannot be contained in the universe, who has no beginning and no end, would be likely to lend himself to this kind of trickery? What a small God that would be, an abracadabra God, like the magician that Philip met in Samaria!

RACHEL If I've understood your words well, you're doing away with a lot of things eucharistic theologies, whole libraries of weighty tomes, processions using the Blessed Sacrament, monstrances, chalices, perpetual adorations, Tantum Ergos, the Council of Trent and Sunday mass!

JESUS Listen, Rachel, do you hear that? It's the wind. You can't catch it, because it blows where it will. Neither can you capture God in a church, or in a piece of bread or a cup of wine.

RACHEL I still have a thousand questions, but now I don't even know what I should ask you.

JESUS What is greatest, Rachel, God has revealed in what is simplest. In bread, there is bread. In wine, there is wine. And in community, when that bread and that wine are shared, when all is shared in common, then God becomes present.

RACHEL Friends, don't lose faith, … I mean, don't lose our signal! Stay with us for our next broadcast. From Jerusalem for Emisoras Latinas, Rachel Perez.

MUSIC

ANNOUNCER Another God is Possible. Exclusive interviews with Jesus Christ in his second coming to Earth. A production of María and José Ignacio López Vigil, with the support of the Syd Forum and Christian Aid.

INTERVIEW 65: BACKGROUND MATERIAL

Miracle, magic, marvel

During the first centuries of Christianity both men and women could preside at the eucharistic celebrations – there was no distinction made. Starting in the fifth century presiding at the Eucharist became a function exercised exclusively by "presbyters" (elders, or priests), who had by then become "professionals of the sacred". In the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) it was established that no one could celebrate the Eucharist (that is, say mass), unless he was *a priest validly and licitly ordained.*

During the Middle Ages devotion to the "eucharistic miracle" reached exaggerated proportions, effectively robbing the Eucharist of its symbolic and communitarian character (sharing a meal and the words of Jesus) and endowing the priests who performed that "miracle" with "magical" powers. This obsessive fixation with the "miracle" that occurs at every mass has lasted down to our own days and is still encouraged by the Catholic authorities. In 1935 Pope Pius XI stated that in reality *the priest has power over the very body of Jesus Christ and make him present on our altars* (encyclical "Ad Catholici Sacerdotii"), and in 1947 Pope Pius XII reaffirmed that *on our altars Christ offers Himself daily for our redemption* (encyclical "Mediator Dei").

Heart muscle and clotted blood

The official Catholic doctrine on the Eucharist has given rise to some ridiculous devotions. One of the most extraordinary is the one called "the greatest eucharistic miracle in history": what is supposed to be a piece of Jesus' heart and five clots of his blood have been preserved in a church in Lanciano, Italy, since the year 700; this marvel is supposed to have occurred when a monk had doubts about the "miracle" that his words worked on the host and the chalice when he celebrated mass.

The Catholic writer Stephanie Falasca comments on this miracle, using scientific terms: *True flesh and true human blood. They belong to the same blood group: AB. In the flesh there are present, in section, the myocardium, the endocardium, the vagus nerve and, because of the notable thickness of the myocardium, the left cardiac ventricle: it is, then, a heart that is complete in its essential structure. In the blood are found present the normally fraccionated proteins in the same proportion as we find them in the serum-protein pattern of normal fresh blood. … Even though they have been left in a natural state for twelve centuries, without any type of preservation or mummification, and exposed to the action of physical, atmospheric and biological agents, this flesh and this blood present the same characteristics as flesh and blood that are extracted fresh from a living body.*

Besides being repugnant, such a materialist "miracle" provokes a materialist question: How could the risen Jesus live without such a vital organ as his own heart?

According to Falasca, "miracles" of that sort – real flesh and blood on the altars of priests tormented by doubts of faith – have happened twenty-five times, including ten in Italy and seven in Spain. She states, though, that the wonder of Lanciano is the only one that has been submitted to "rigorous scientific analysis". The Vatican has approved the "miracle" of Lanciano. In 2004 Pope John Paul II wrote the following to the archbishop of Lanciano: *For us Christians, the Eucharist is everything: it is the center of our faith and the source of all our spiritual life. … This is especially true for the community of Lanciano, guardian of two eucharistic miracles which, in addition to being highly esteemed by the faithful of the place, are the destination of many pilgrimages from Italy and from all over the world.*

Without inequality or discrimination

Jesus tells Rachel of what he heard about the community of Corinth, where people celebrated the Eucharist, but in the midst of great inequality. Paul wrote them a letter reprehending them for such conduct (1 Corinthians 11,17-34). Jesus also mentions the meeting between Philip and Simon the magician, which is recounted in the Acts of the Apostles 8,9-13.

James, the brother of Jesus, who led the church of Jerusalem until he was murdered by the High Priest Ananias in the year 62, was also mindful of Jesus' teaching about inequality. In his letter he warns about discrimination or "partiality" when celebrating the Eucharist: *Brothers and sisters, don't hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ of glory with partiality. For if a man with a gold ring, in fine clothing, comes into your synagogue , and a poor man in filthy clothing also comes in; and you pay special attention to him who wears the fine clothing, and say, "Sit here in a good place;" and you tell the poor man, "Stand there," or "Sit by my footstool;" haven't you shown partiality among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts? Listen, my beloved brothers. Didn't God choose those who are poor in this world to be rich in faith, and heirs of the Kingdom which he promised to those who love him? But you have dishonored the poor man. Don't the rich oppress you, and personally drag you before the courts? Don't they blaspheme the honorable name by which you are called?* (James 2,1-7)

A space of equality

The early Christians insisted that the eucharistic celebration should be a space of equality and justice, where people shared words, food, and even possessions. The first Church Fathers spoke also in this vein. For example, Saint Justin preached: *The Eucharist is the moment in which Christians give to the needy, according to what each one has.* And Saint Cyprian: *When the rich do not take to mass that which the poor need, they do not celebrate the sacrifice of the Lord.* When the emperor order an assault on the inhabitants of Thessalonica, Saint Ambrose wrote him a letter saying: *I will not offer the sacrifice of the mass before you, if you should dare to attend.*

In describing the beginnings of the early church, theologian Hans Kung refers to the new Christian "ethical ideal" of justice and equality: *What was truly surprising and attractive to many outsiders was the social cohesion of the Christians, such as it was expressed in worship: they were "brothers" and "sisters" without distinctions of class, race, or education; everybody could take part in the Eucharist. Generous voluntary offerings were made, usually during the worship service. Such offerings, administered and distributed by the bishop, provided assistance for the poor, the sick, orphans and widows, travelers, those serving prison terms, the needy and the elderly. In this respect correct living (ortho-praxy) was more important in the daily life of the communities that correct teaching (ortho-doxy). In any case, this was an important reason for the exceptional success of Christianity. … This loving revolution, this revolutionary movement "from below", in the end imposed itself on the Roman empire.*

Sharing is of the essence

Sharing is the essential note of the eucharistic meal. Theologian John Dominic Crossan writes: *The Eucharist is a real shared meal. The accent is on the breaking of the bread, which is a sign of*

sharing. The emphasis is not so much on the wine as on the cup, which can also be passed from one person to another. A Eucharist without sharing is nothing. For that reason Paul (1 Corinthinas 11,17-34) and the Didache condemn those who do not share with others in the eucharistic suppers. We can never prescind from that in the Eucharist: it is food and drink, the material bases of life offered equally to all, and in them can be found the presence of God and of Jesus.

The Didache is an ancient book that was discovered in the 14th century. It is neither a letter of the first disciples nor a gospel, but it is a vital source for knowing the history of early Christianity, since it served the first communities as a manual of instructions and helped them stay faithful to the teachings of Jesus.

Knowing how to sense the wind

At the end of the interview Jesus speaks to Rachel about the wind, to help her understand that there are realities that cannot be understood rationally; they can be grasped only by the spirit, a spirit that is free and open. In John's gospel, Jesus uses the metaphor of the wind (John 3,8). A story told by a Indian Jesuit also portrays "the wind" as an element that "describes" the way that leads us to the Mystery of God.

According to this story, an American visiting China asked a young elevator operator: "What is China's religion?" The young fellow took the visitor out on a balcony and asked him: "What do you see?" He answered: "I see cars and stores." "And what else?" the young man asked. "I see people, flowers, trees, birds." "And what else?" he asked again. "I see how the wind moves." "Well," said the young fellow, "that is the religion of China: a way of looking at reality. We start off from lifeless things, we move on to living beings, and we end up with what is invisible and free, what we cannot capture."

Many contemporary theologians believe that when China becomes the next world power, the West will have to face the challenge of the Asian religions. Buddhists, Hindus, Taoists, and Confucians will ask us questions that western Christian culture is not ready or able to answer, because we do not possess even the basic conceptual tools needed to comprehend what is at the heart of their visions of the world, of life, and of God. And we don't possess them because we have forgotten about the "wind", because we cannot see it and we are not taught to feel it.

Interview 66
PRIESTS?

RACHEL Today we have the mobile unit of Emisoras Latinas located near what was once the great Temple of Jerusalem. The most recent declarations of Jesus Christ concerning the Eucharist, as well as those he made in earlier programs about confession, have our telephone lines completely jammed. A listener from Asuncion, Paraguay, named Arturo Bregaglio, asks the following question

ARTURO If you say that priests cannot pardon sins or consecrate the host, then what purpose do priests serve?

RACHEL Did you catch that question, Jesus?

JESUS Yes, I heard it clearly.

RACHEL So, then, what purpose do priests serve?

JESUS I think that none at all.

RACHEL What do you mean, none at all?

JESUS None at all.

RACHEL With such a blunt statement, wouldn't you be disqualifying even yourself?

JESUS Myself? Why?

RACHEL Well, because… aren't you the High Priest of the New Covenant?

JESUS Among my people only those of the tribe of Levi, the Levites, were priests. I wasn't one of them.

RACHEL So you are not a priest?

JESUS No I'm not, and I never was one. In fact, I had some tremendous quarrels with the priests of my time.

RACHEL What was the reason for those quarrels?

JESUS Their arrogance. They felt themselves superior. They thought they were masters of the truth, and they despised the simple people. They considered themselves mediators between heaven and earth, representatives of God! I still chuckle when I remember the expression on their faces when I made that remark I mentioned the other day. That was the time I told them "The whores will enter into the Kingdom of heaven before you do!"

RACHEL You said that, using that bad word?

JESUS What bad word?

RACHEL That one you just said…

JESUS Whores? Of course. Those women I always respected, but those guys I didn't. They were stuck-up. Whitewashed tombs, full of dead bones.

RACHEL In any case, if *you* weren't a priest, then your apostles were.

JESUS Why do you say that?

RACHEL During the Last Supper, even though you claim that you didn't consecrate either bread or wine, you did consecrate your twelve apostles as priests.

JESUS Where did you get that idea, Rachel? I never consecrated anybody. In our movement there were no priests. Neither were there any in the first communities, from what they tell me. They were ordinary people, men and especially women, who were responsible for carrying on the work of the Kingdom of God. They didn't even use the word "priest".

RACHEL Priest doesn't mean sacred?

JESUS Priest means distant, separated from the people. To work for the Kingdom, you have be in among the people.

RACHEL So where did the priests come from, the clergy who say they represent you?

JESUS Well, I don't know what tribe they might have come from, because in our movement we didn't accept that kind of hierarchy.

RACHEL Hold on a moment…. A text message is arriving … It's from a lay theologian, José María Marín … This is what it says, let me read it "The ordination of priests has nothing to do with Jesus. It is a much later custom, coming from the Roman empire. That's where the Catholic clergy arose, full of power and privileges. For Jesus the community needs no mediator before God."

JESUS I like the way that fellow explains it.

RACHEL So what do we do with the priests?

JESUS Let them be born again, as I counseled old Nicodemus. If they join in the struggle, if they live among the people, if their words give joy to the hearts of the poor and are a two-edged sword against the unjust, then all will be well. But if they think they're masters of a ladder that leads to God, like the one in Jacob's dreams, then they're

useless, because God is not up above, nor is he far away. He is here, in the midst of us.

RACHEL And what do you say, listener friends of Emisoras Latinas? And especially, what do you think, those of you listening to us who are priests and reverends and pastors? For Emisoras Latinas, this Rachel Perez in Jerusalem.

MUSIC

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INTERVIEW 66: BACKGROUND MATERIAL

Priest: sacred and separate

Priests exist in many cultures – western, eastern, African, or Amerindian – where they are thought to serve as intermediaries between humans and the divine: they placate or gratify the gods through certain rites, prayers or sacrifices. In the Hellenistic cultural setting, the priest was designated by the word "hiereus", which means "holy," "sacred," and therefore "separate," "segregated," belonging to the realm of the divine. In all such cultures the priest is the one who "knows" about the things of God and has "power" over the divine. That knowledge and that power give him the right to many social, political, economic and cultural privileges.

A powerful caste

In the time of Jesus, the Jerusalem priests constituted the class with the greatest social influence; they served in the Temple, whose "sanctuary" was for Judaism the privileged site of "God's presence". Only the priests could enter into that sacred space, called the "Holy of Holies". That is where the sacrifices were performed, with the burning of perfumes and the slaying of animals. Just as in all other religions, the Jewish priests were considered to be men chosen to have direct contact with the sacred; they were intermediaries before God, separated from and superior to all other men. They occupied the summit of a hierarchical society that kept the majority of its people subservient. In the time of Jesus the priests were divided into 24 classes or sections, each section having about 300 priests.

The gospel narratives show Jesus in frequent conflict with the priests, arguing with them, reproaching them, rejecting their religious arguments. The gospels also make clear how the priests accused Jesus of being possessed by demons and of having no authority to speak as he did; they rejected his message and his actions; and finally, they denounced him and condemned him to death.

Jesus was not a priest

Jesus was not a priest. He was a layman. In Jesus' time, all the priests were Jews from the tribe of Levi, who were considered the heirs of Aaron, Moses' brother. Jesus was not a priest, but rather fought against the priestly caste and was reviled by the priests of his time. Jesus was a lay person (from the Greek *laikos*, meaning "of the people"). Only in the Letter to the Hebrews, attributed to Paul but written by one of his disciples, is Jesus called a "priest of the new covenant", a covenant that superceded the old covenant and abolished the levitical priesthood.

The legacy of the lay Jesus of Nazareth

When theologians make Jesus into a priest and use the symbolic language of Hebrews to promote the idea that priests are "other Christs", they are betraying the true message of Jesus. Jesus never promoted any kind of priesthood in his movement. What is more, he called into question the very essence of priesthood, namely, the idea that some people should be consecrated as mediators between God and other humans, and that they exercised such mediation by performing sacred rites in sacred places at sacred times. Jesus undercut the institution of priesthood in various ways: a) by affirming that we do not need mediators, because God lives in us and not in some temple; b) by rejecting blood sacrifices and proposing relations with one's neighbor as the only way to enter into relation with God: and c) by not blindly respecting the Sabbath as a sacred day. The fact that Jesus was a lay person who defied and contradicted the priests was a deciding factor in his murder. For that reason, being critical of priesthood is a way for Christians to continue the legacy of the lay Jesus of Nazareth.

As the Spanish theologian José Ignacio González Faus explains: *The Church must have and has always had leaders, but those leaders have nothing to do with the "religious" fact of priesthood.* Priests and bishops, such as we know them today, did not even figure in Jesus' imagination. They arose in the course of Christianity's historical evolution as one more expression of the installation of a male hierarchy at the head of the power structures of the nascent official church.

A polemical book

In his polemical book, *Clerics: Psychograma of an Ideal* (Editorial Trotta, Madrid, 1995), the German Catholic theologian Eugen Drewermann, using his psychoanalytic skills to analyze the characteristics of the "vocation" of priests and vowed religious, arrives at conclusions which lay bare the pathogenic roots of Catholic "functionaries" and, by extension, of those societies which have been dominated by Catholic morality for centuries.

The book is long, provocative, and packed with information and suggestive reflections. Its main aim is to free people, as he states in explaining his objectives: *The simplest way to smudge that halo of divine predilection that clerics seem to wear is to show that their image of superiority, with its unearthly airs, is woven out of psychological repressions and transferences which are quite "earthly" indeed.* We recommend this book for its clarity and its audacity.

Women with priestly tasks

All the patriarchal cultures have considered the prime priestly task – mediation between divinity and humanity – to be something that corresponds in a special way to men. Even so, many of the ancient

religions, such as in Egypt, Greece and Rome, involved priestesses in their cultic worship, and in the present day, there are many religious cultures which include women as “shamans”. The monotheistic religions (Judaism, Christianity, Islam), however, totally exclude women from the priesthood.

In the history of religions women priests were linked to fertility cults, to rites related to vegetable and animal life, to ceremonies centered on dance and music, and to feasts that celebrated sexuality. In contrast, the male priesthood appeared more often connected to religions which prized brutish, bloody sacrifices. Male priesthood stressed the expiation of sins and the imposition of norms, repressions and restrictions; it was wedded to authority, wars, violence and cruelty.

Widows, the original Christian priestesses

The first Christian communities spoke more of “presbyters” (elders) than of “priests” in the old Jewish or Greek sense. In a world where people did not live as long as they do now, old age arrived soon, and it was culturally associated with wisdom and leadership in the community.

Theologian José María Marín explains: *The widowed woman was the equivalent of the male presbyter. The ministry exercised by widows probably constituted an autonomous form of a kind of female presbyterate, which lasted until the fourth century. The “widowhood” was recognized by the communities as an apostolic group, distinct from that of the deaconesses. These widows were called “elders” (or “presbyteresses”), the same title given to the male leaders of the earliest Christian communities. They performed a variety of functions, including domestic pastoral work among women, the charitable services proper to the diaconate, the ministry of prayer, and sacramental ministry like celebrating baptisms and the Eucharist. The widowhood was definitively suppressed in the western church at the Council of Laodicea in the year 343.*

Marín adds: *If Jesus had not placed women on the same level as men, in all the orders, then there is no explanation for why the first Christian communities gave women this prominent ministerial role. Even though Paul was hopelessly misogynist in forbidding “women to speak in the temple” and in prohibiting them from “praying with their heads uncovered”, he cannot help but mention in his letters women who were apostles and ministers, and he indicates that such was the precept of Jesus.*

The priesthood of women

Until the fifth century the habitual practice in Christianity was to ordain women as deaconesses, a rank lower than that of priests. The deaconesses had some functions in the liturgy and the life of the church, although these functions were more limited than those assigned to male deacons. After the fifth century this practice disappeared.

Recently in several Protestant churches (Lutheran, Anglican, Moravian, Episcopalian, etc.) women have begun to be ordained to the priesthood. The Catholic Church is the denomination most opposed to this change.

The debate about women’s ordination in the Catholic Church gained strength in the latter part of the 20th century, when vocations to the priesthood declined. The Catholic Church in the U.S. has offered some pioneering reflections on the appropriateness of ordaining women. The first ordinations of

women, which took place in the Anglican Church in England in March, 1994, added fuel to the debate. In an apostolic letter of May, 1994, Pope John Paul II sought to settle the matter by stating bluntly: *I declare that the Church in no way has the ability to confer priestly ordination on women and that this affirmation should be considered to be definitive by all the faithful.*

In its Apostolic Letter "Ordenatio Sacerdotalis" of 1995, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith ratified this position in order to *remove all doubt about a question of great importance, which pertains to the divine constitution of the Church itself.* This document states that the exclusion of women from the priesthood *should be observed always, everywhere and by all the faithful, since it belongs to the deposit of faith.* This constitutes a definitive rejection of women's ordination, since the term "deposit of faith" represents for the Church the highest degree of theological certainty apart from the official declaration of a dogma. In fact, it indicates that this doctrine is considered infallible and therefore something that cannot be annulled by any future Pope.

Given all these doctrinal pronouncements, we would be made to understand that women's ordination is a "closed case" among Catholics. In the face of such a negative stance, the question remains: is it worthwhile to keep fighting for women's ordination in the Catholic Church? If Catholic women were at the present time allowed to be ordained priests, as we currently understand priesthood, would they end up transforming the institution, or would they rather be transformed by it? Would women contribute to real change, or would they simply be helping, by injecting a new bit of energy, to sustain a model that is contrary to Jesus' message since it separates the sacred and the profane and establishes a powerful hierarchy, one that was disallowed and abolished by the movement of Jesus? What is clear is that Jesus was against any priesthood, whether of men or of women.

José María Marín

José María Marín is a former Catholic priest, now a lay theologian, who participates in our program by virtue of the lucid ideas expressed in his book, "Christian Priesthood or Ministry of the Community?". Marín demonstrates consistently that Jesus was not a priest and that the first Christian communities were faithful to Jesus in not having priests. The priesthood derived from a tradition that was alien to the gospel.

Marín explains: *The so-called priestly or ministerial ordination is a custom taken over from the Roman empire, in which "ordo" [order] signified a person's access to a determined social class. … For religious ministries the "order of clerics" was established, which is nothing but a "caste" to which one accedes by means of a "course". This "ordo" made clerics powerful and distinguished; it situated them in a stable bureaucracy which began to be called "clergy" and was considered "sacred". The clerics were expected to live separated and distant from rest of the people, the lay folk. Legal and ritual sanctity was required of them, and celibacy was imposed on them, to point of turning their wives into slaves. The celibate state was what most effectively separated them from the people of God.*

Interview 67
PRIESTLY CELIBACY?

RACHEL This is Emisoras Latinas in Jerusalem, a city where cultures and religions meet and intermingle. And where once again we meet up with Jesus Christ, in these historic days of his second coming to earth. Good morning, Jesus.

JESUS Good morning to you, Rachel.

RACHEL In our last interview we spoke about priests. Now it's time to treat an especially polemical topic celibacy, forbidding priests to marry and have a family.

JESUS I can see where you're coming from, Rachel! Are you going to make me responsible for that law also?

RACHEL You have nothing to do with that?

JESUS Nothing at all. I did not place that yoke on anybody. How could I do that if all the men in our movement had wives? Philip, Nathaniel, Peter, Matthew, all of them.

RACHEL But the Bible forbids priests to get married.

JESUS The Bible? What God says is that it is not good for a man to be alone. Even Paul, they tell me, a man who was pretty severe, recommended that the bishops have wives. Just one, of course. He said, and rightly so, that if the bishops could not manage their own household well, much less could they manage the community.

RACHEL So when did the law of celibacy come in?

JESUS Who knows? Why don't you consult your friends?

RACHEL Hold on a moment… I'm going to make a call … Hello, do you hear me okay?... Here we are in Jerusalem, listeners, on the line with Iván Vargas, who is a specialist in this topic. Iván, we want to know when celibacy for priests was established.

IVÁN Well, that's a rather curious question. It was in the Council of Nicea, in the year 325, when it was decided that priests could not get married.

RACHEL Why do you say it's curious question?

IVÁN Because a few years before this Council, the Roman emperor Constantine had given the bishops and the priests large amounts of land and money.

RACHEL And what does that have to do with priests not marrying?

IVÁN It has a lot to do. Imagine that a bishop has a hundred acres of land and a bunch of money saved up. If that bishop is married, who will get his land and his savings when he dies?

RACHEL His wife and children, naturally.

IVÁN But if he's not married, then the church receives all that. Consequently, the church was not interested in having bishops and priests married and with kids, as long as … [chuckles].

RACHEL As long as what?

IVÁN As long as they didn't recognize them. What was prohibited was that legally recognizing them, because concubines and illegitimate children had no rights, they could not inherit.

RACHEL And that was the reason for the law of celibacy?

IVÁN That was it, Rachel. Prohibiting priests from marrying was necessary to protect the church's patrimony.

RACHEL It seems incredible.

IVÁN That's how the Church accumulated ever more properties and vast estates. Eventually the church became the largest landholder in all of Europe. The popes, the bishops and the priests kept having women and children, but they didn't recognize them, they left them illegitimate. That way they couldn't inherit anything.

JESUS And you make me responsible for all that!

IVÁN The funniest part is that Pope Paul III, who had "quite a few" illegitimate children, was the one who definitively imposed celibacy for all priests at the Council of Trent.

JESUS Hypocrites. They load heavy burdens onto the shoulders of others, but they don't raise a finger to help them.

RACHEL Thank you, Iván. After hearing all this, Jesus, are you in favor of optional celibacy? Do you approve of priests getting married?

JESUS Of course. Let each person decide. Let each one choose his or her own way. The Kingdom of God is a struggle and requires much effort. But it is also a celebration, so the burden must be light and the yoke easy to bear.

RACHEL The law of celibacy. Obligatory celibacy. What do the churches think about all this? And above all, what is the opinion of all those women and children who are not acknowledged as wives and as sons and daughters? We'll see you all in our next

program. Meanwhile, receive a greeting from Rachel Perez, special correspondent for Emisoras Latinas in Jerusalem.

MUSIC

ANNOUNCER Another God is Possible. Exclusive interviews with Jesus Christ in his second coming to Earth. A production of María and José Ignacio López Vigil, with the support of the Syd Forum and Christian Aid.

INTERVIEW 67: BACKGROUND MATERIAL

An ascetical practice

Asceticism derives from a dualistic school of thought that opposes body to spirit and considers spirit superior to body. As a form of asceticism, celibacy is practiced in many religious traditions: in Buddhist monasteries, in Jainism, in Hinduism…. The practice was also found in ancient Judaism, for example, among the Essenes. However, the priests of the Old Testament did not practice celibacy; they got married and had families. The elders and other leaders of the first Christian communities also got married, as the New Testament makes clear. Saint Paul's only recommendation in this regard was that those who attained the position of bishop should be *married with just one woman* (1 Timothy 3,2-5).

Where the law of celibacy comes from: a short history of fourteen centuries

Chilean historian and writer Iván Ljubetic Vargas participates in our program thanks to his ability to instruct us on the great variety of topics that he treats in his many books. He provides the following synthesis of the history of the law of celibacy:

In the first three centuries of the Christian era most elders (priests) were married. Starting in the fourth century, the idea that priesthood and matrimony were incompatible began to gain ground. At the council of Elvira (306 CE) a decree was approved which stated: *Any priest who sleeps with his wife the night before celebrating mass will lose his status.* The Council of Nicea (325) issued the first decree forbidding priests to get married. This disposition, however, was not observed in practice.

The Second Council of Tours (567) established that *any cleric who is found in bed with his wife will be excommunicated for one year and reduced to the lay state.* Pope Pelagius II (575-590) ordered that married priests should not be chastised *as long as they did not turn church properties over to their wives or children.* His decree in this regard (580) is revealing: it exposed explicitly for the first time the true material and economic reasons for the requirement of priestly celibacy: the inheritance of properties.

From the Council of Nicea until the tenth century many local synods were held in which the matter of celibacy was treated. Some synods required married priests to abandon their wives, some allowed them to continue to live with their wives, and some allowed cohabitation so long as the priest

promised to remained with only one woman. In that period of six centuries there were eleven Popes who were children of Popes or other clerics.

In the seventh century most French priests were married. The eighth Council of Toledo (653) established that the wives of priests could be sold as slaves. Pope Leo XI, who governed the Church in the eleventh century, determined that the women living with priests should serve as slaves in the Roman Lateran palace.

In spite of all this, in the eighth century Saint Boniface informed the Pope that in Germany hardly any bishop or priest was celibate. The Council of Aix-la-Chapelle (836) admitted that abortion and infanticide was being practiced in convents and monasteries to cover up the sexual relations of clergy.

It is important to keep in mind the economic backdrop of all this. From the fifth century on, the Catholic Church gradually became the most powerful body in Europe, the largest landholder of the continent. The most powerful economic entities were the monasteries. In the tenth century the monastery of Cluny stood out especially. At the head of this network of monasteries and convents stood the Pope of Rome, who possessed enormous wealth and property. At the time Popes, cardinals, archbishops, bishops and abbots all belonged to the feudal nobility, which was permanently expanding its properties thanks to lay people who made donations and bequests to the church authorities as a way of obtaining pardon for their sins.

When in the tenth and eleventh centuries the serfs began to rise up against the lords, the church became fearful about what would happen to their extensive properties. Given this situation, the leaders of the “Cluny movement” made efforts to strengthen the church by imposing severe rules, among which was celibacy. In the year 1073 the monk Hildebrand, a leader of the “Cluny movement”, was made Pope, taking the name Gregory VII. As Pope, he conceived himself to be the absolute sovereign of a worldwide state. To achieve that goal it was necessary that the lands which belonged to the church not be dismembered. He is known for this statement: *The church will never be free of the claws of the laity if the priests do not first manage to free themselves from the claws of their wives.*

In 1095 Pope Urban II ordered that the wives of priests be sold as slaves, leaving their children abandoned. In the twelfth century five councils were held at the Lateran in Rome, in the first of which it was decreed that all marriages of clergy were invalid.

Despite these efforts, history shows that imposing clerical celibacy was not an easy task. In the fifteenth century, about 50% of the priests were married, and eight Popes contracted matrimony after the first Lateran Council. Between the twelfth and fifteenth centuries, since it was quite normal and customary for priests to have concubines and so not comply with the law of celibacy, the bishops imposed the so-called “whores’ tax”, which set the amount that a priest had to pay the bishop each time he engaged in sexual relations. These charges did not cease to be applied until 1435.

It was the Council of Trent (1545-1563) that definitively established the discipline of obligatory celibacy for priests and explicitly prohibited married men from being ordained priests.

In the Eastern Orthodox churches today, priests are able to marry, and celibacy is required only of bishops. The Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century resolutely rejected clerical celibacy.

Pope Paul VI in his 1967 encyclical “Sacerdotalis Coelibatus” reaffirmed the doctrine of obligatory celibacy, stating that *celibacy gives a fullness to life, it is the source of apostolic fruitfulness, it is the most intimate and complete relation with the mystery of Christ and the Church, and it gives the highest expression to the most elevated human values.*

Optional celibacy

In the 1970s there arose in Spain and other countries of Europe and the world the Movement for Optional Celibacy, which was made up mainly of married Catholic priests who remained connected to Christian “communities of equals”, communities without hierarchies. Along with their families, they work to declericalize the ecclesial ministries and to promote a church made up of persons who are all co-responsible for bringing to the world the good news of justice and equality that Jesus of Nazareth announced.

Interview 68
SACRED PLACES?

RACHEL We continue with our exclusive coverage of the second coming of Jesus Christ to earth. Our microphones are today located alongside the famous Wall of Lamentations, the only ruins that remain of that great Temple of Jerusalem, which was destroyed by the Roman emperor Titus in the year 70. You knew this Temple well, didn't you, Jesus?

JESUS I knew it in all its splendor, Rachel. And look what it is today. Not one stone has been left upon another, … just a piece of wall…

RACHEL Did you visit the Temple often?

JESUS That last time I was there I had a whip in my hand. The priests had turned it into a cave of thieves.

RACHEL Was it that you preferred to pray in other temples, perhaps in simpler places of worship?

JESUS No, I already told you that to speak with God I used to go up on the mountain at night. I would watch the stars, the face of the moon … I never liked temples much.

RACHEL All the same, in your name hundreds, thousands of temples have been raised all around the world. There are churches, cathedrals, basilicas, sanctuaries, oratories, chapels, …

JESUS And you say they've all been built in my name?

RACHEL Of course. You've already seen some of them around here. They're Christian temples, in honor of you and your mother Mary.

JESUS What a terrible memory the people who built them must have! In our movement we never used to go to the temples to pray. And my mother used to pray while she was cooking the lentils or fetching water from the well.

RACHEL But the first Christians must have had temples for celebrating the Eucharist, isn't that so?

JESUS I don't think so, not from what they've told me. The early Christians used to meet in their homes. There were no temples, no altars.

RACHEL Was it because they didn't have money to build them?

JESUS No, it was because they had enough faith *not* to build them. Look, I remember one time we were returning to Galilee and passing through Samaria. Between the Jews and the Samaritans, you know, there were always disputes. The Samaritans claimed that God

had to be adored in the temple of Garizim, but Peter, James and the others were arguing that God had to be adored in the temple of Jerusalem.

RACHEL And as a good Jew, you preferred Jerusalem.

JESUS Not at all. I said that it was neither one place nor the other. God does not live in buildings made by human hands. God cannot be contained in churches or in synagogues. I told them that all the temple veils needed to be ripped apart.

RACHEL I have to put to you a question that our listeners must be asking themselves do you realize that the largest of all the temples built in your name is the basilica of the Vatican in Rome, where the Pope lives, the successor of Peter and your principal representative?

JESUS And what's that temple like? Bigger than the one that used to be here in Jersusalem?

RACHEL Much, much bigger. I've been there. The temple that you knew would be like a toy beside the Basilica of Saint Peter. Inside it there are statues, golden altars, jewels, museums, invaluable treasures, hidden riches, …

JESUS And you say that that's the temple of Peter, my friend from Capernaum, the fisherman?

RACHEL That's what they call it the Basilica of Saint Peter.

JESUS Well, on behalf of my friend Peter, who's not here, I'd certainly like to speak with that fellow who says that he represents Peter and me.

RACHEL Would you be ready for a debate at that level?

JESUS Why not? In the course of these days I've discovered so many unusual things that I really need to ask that Pope some questions.

RACHEL Emisoras Latinas will organize that interview. It will be a journalistic coup! Stay tuned, listeners, we'll inform you in good time. And while we await that moment, this has been Rachel Perez reporting for from Jerusalem.

MUSIC

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INTERVIEW 68: BACKGROUND MATERIAL

Sacred spaces

There are two types of sacred spaces: those offered by nature (a mountain, a river, a cave) and those built by human communities. A temple is a building that some religion considers “sacred” because it is special, “separated”, “consecrated”. It is sacred because “God is there” or because it is a place where people can communicate with God by saying prayers, performing sacrifices or practicing other rites. It is sacred also because the priests (“sacred” persons) carry out their activities there. The religions of the ancient world had temples; this was true in Egypt, Greece, Rome, and all the ancient civilizations. In Galilee, where he lived his whole life, Jesus was familiar with synagogues, not temples; synagogues were buildings that were also considered “sacred”, although not nearly so sacred as the great temple of Judaism, the Jerusalem Temple.

The synagogues

About 500 years before the time of Jesus the first Temple of Jerusalem, which had been built by King Solomon, was destroyed, and many people were deported from Israel to Babylon. As a result, the Jews began to build synagogues in the towns and villages; these were simple houses of worship where people could come together to pray and read the scriptures. No sacrifices were offered in the synagogues. In the time of Jesus, although there was already a new Temple in Jerusalem, there were a great many synagogues throughout the country.

In the synagogue all the people assembled on Saturdays to recite prayers and to listen to the rabbi or some other man who might want to make commentaries on the scriptural texts that had been read. In several gospel accounts Jesus appears in the synagogue of Nazareth or in that of Capernaum.

The synagogue was not much like present-day Christian temples. It was a place that was more informal, more unaffected, and more lay-oriented. There one could speak freely, and there was no need for a sacred minister to be preside.

The Temple of Jerusalem

The Jerusalem Temple that Jesus knew was a grandiose construction of King Herod the Great, which was built on the site of the Solomon’s first Temple. The Temple with its courtyards took up one-fifth of the area of the walled city. It was the nation’s religious center, but also its financial center, since the Temple treasury was located there, next to the great courtyard which women and Gentiles could enter; this was where the Israelites turned in their donations for the cult. The country’s most powerful people donated to the Temple incalculable wealth in the form of coins and precious objects. The treasury also provided banking functions, and many people deposited their possessions there for safekeeping, especially the families belonging to the aristocracy and the priestly caste. As a result, the Temple was the most important financial institution of the country.

In all the gospel accounts where Jesus appears in or around the Temple, he is portrayed as critical of all that went on there. At the end of his life Jesus performed the bold gesture of driving out of the Temple precincts the money-changers and others who carried on the economic operations that enriched the priestly caste. With that dramatic act Jesus signed his death warrant.

There shall not be left one stone upon another

The Jerusalem Temple was destroyed by the Roman legions of the emperor Titus in the year 70 CE, when the Romans ferociously quelled the rebellion of the nationalist Zealot movement. The whole city of Jerusalem was razed as a result of that violent confrontation. Jerusalem's definitive destruction took place about 60 years later, during the final insurrection of the Zealots.

Jesus did not actually "predict" that this would happen (*There shall not be left one stone upon another,* Luke 21,5-11), but since the gospels were written after this devastation took place, the "prediction" was put on Jesus' lips by the evangelists, in order to lend more authority to his outspoken criticism of the opulence and power of the Temple. Today the only part of that grandiose building that has been preserved is a piece of the western wall, called the Wall of Lamentations by the Jews. Before its immense stones faithful Jews come together daily to pray.

God is not in any temple

About four centuries before the time of Jesus, the Samaritan community separated itself decisively from the Jewish community and built its own temple on Mount Garizim. This separation was the culmination of a religious schism that divided the two peoples from one another. From that point on tensions increased, so that by the time of Jesus the enmity between them was quite strong. It was expressly forbidden that a Jew marry a Samaritan, because the Jews considered the Samaritans impure, pagan and even foreign, despite the fact that both peoples came from the same bloodline.

The temple of Garizim was a rival to the one in Jerusalem, and around 129 BCE it was destroyed by the Jewish king John Hircanus. About the time that Jesus was a boy, the Samaritans took revenge by scattering the bones of dead people in the Jerusalem Temple to defile it. It was with this background of religious tensions that Jesus spoke freely and cordially with a Samaritan woman (John 4,1-30), a conversation that caused scandal among those of his movement.

On that occasion Jesus told the Samaritan woman that God was not to be adored in any temple, but was to be experienced in human relations of justice and equality. This principle of worship is rejected even in our present day by the hierarchs of the Christian churches, who continue to build costly temples and to teach that they are sacred spaces where people may find God. Naturally, since those temples are also the places where alms and tithes are collected, donations are received and consciences are controlled.

Neither temples nor altars

Following the teachings of Jesus, the first Christians had no temples. Stephen, one of the first leaders of the Christian communities, taught that *God does not dwell in buildings made by human hands* (Acts 7,48-49). In early Christianity there were no temples and no altars; rather, the people gathered together in their own homes around a simple table. Paul insisted that Christians themselves were the true temples of God (1 Corinthians 3,16-17), and even in the third century – according to the Didascalia -- the Syrian Christians held that widows, orphans, the poor and the elderly were "the only altar of God".

The Vatican Basilica

Saint Peter's Basilica in Rome is the center of the Vatican state and the largest and most visited temple of the Catholic world. It was built over the course of several centuries and finished in 1626. It began simply as a monument commemorating the place where Peter was buried, according to tradition. When Christianity became the official religion of the Roman empire in the fourth century, the emperor Constantine had a basilica built in that place, designed after the buildings dedicated to the worship of the Roman gods. In the fifteenth century the Popes decided to demolish that first temple in order to raise a much larger one, which would be in accord with the ecclesiastical power exercised by Rome, which by that time dominated all of Europe.

The funds to construct the enormous basilica that we know today came from the sale of indulgences which people bought to have souls released from purgatory; such indulgences were sold throughout Europe. Outstanding architects and artists took part in the construction of the Vatican Basilica: Bramante, Raphael, Sangallo, Michelangelo. Gian Lorenzo Bernini designed the gigantic plaza and the colonnade.

Interview 69
PAYING TITHES?

PREACHER Open up your hand, brother! … Don't rob God! … Obey the commandment and pay your tithe, alleluia!

RACHEL Our mobile unit is installed today in front of a Pentecostal church in the Christian quarter of Jerusalem. Do you hear that, Jesus?

JESUS Yes, Rachel, but … what is the preacher asking for?

RACHEL He wants the faithful to pay their tithes, just as you taught people to do. Or am I wrong again?

JESUS You sure are, Rachel. I never spoke about tithes.

RACHEL You didn't command your followers to give the tenth part of their income for the maintenance of the church?

JESUS Quite the contrary. I criticized the Pharisees who were paying tithes even on cumin and mint, but forgot about the commandment of justice and love.

RACHEL And you didn't pay the tithes yourself?

JESUS How was I to pay them if I didn't have any money? I'd have done better to collect them!

RACHEL So if it wasn't you who laid down that norm, where did so many Christian churches get it from? The Bible doesn't say anything about tithing?

JESUS Yes, it does. It was a law aimed at helping the Levites, since they had no lands of their own, and it especially provided assistance for foreigners and widows. The tithes weren't for filling the Temple's coffers; they were meant to be distributed among the poor.

RACHEL Well, I think that some people understand the matter backwards. We have a call coming in… Yes, hello?

GARY Hi! This is Gary Amirault. I'm calling from Missouri in the United States.

RACHEL Great! Talk to us, Mr Amirault.

GARY I'm listening to your program. You, miss journalist, and you, "Jesus Christ", do you want to know the real origins of the custom of paying the church a tenth part of what you earn?

RACHEL Yes, that's what we're trying to clarify.

GARY In the early church there was never any talk of tithing. The Christians of the first communities shared everything they had in common, so that no one would suffer need.

JESUS Ask him, then, when that awful custom of charging tithes began.

RACHEL So, Mr Amirault, when did some evangelical churches begin to require tithes?

GARY In reality, it wasn't groups like the Mormons or the Adventists that began the custom. It goes back much further, to the sixth century, when the Catholic Church hierarchs needed money, a lot of money, to bankroll their luxurious lifestyle. That's when they remembered that ancient law of Moses, and they blamed it on Jesus.

JESUS On me?

GARY In the year 567, the Council of Tours declared tithes to be obligatory and ordered excommunication for anyone who didn't pay them. In some countries, such as France, the Catholic Church charged this "religious tax" until very recent times, right up to the French Revolution. Does this explain the matter to "Jesus Christ"?

JESUS What's clear to me is that those people were worse scoundrels than the priests of my own time. There were wicked shepherds who fleeced the sheep instead of caring for them.

PASTOR Well, well, brother and sister. I don't know who you are, but I invite you to attend our worship service.

JESUS No, thank you, because … I don't have any money to pay the tithe.

PASTOR You have absolutely nothing at all to offer to God?

JESUS Let me see. Ah, yes, I have here a couple of small coins, like the ones that widow had, the one I saw once, praying in the entrance to the Temple.

PASTOR Well, if you want to come in and offer your coins to God…

JESUS No, I think I'd prefer to buy something from those children who are selling candy on the street corner. Let's get out of here, Rachel!

RACHEL Yeah, let's get out of here, before they throw us out. For Emisoras Latinas, this is Rachel Perez in Jerusalem.

MUSIC

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INTERVIEW 69: BACKGROUND MATERIAL

An obligatory tax

The tithe is a tax, the tenth part of a harvest, a salary or any form of wealth, which people are obliged to pay as a tribute to some authority. Tithing is a custom that was practiced in many cultures of the ancient world.

In the Bible, the book of Deuteronomy (14,22-29) commands: *Set apart a tithe of all the yield of your seed that is brought in yearly from the field, … the tithe of your grain, your wine, and your oil, as well as the firstlings of your herd and flock. … Every third year you shall bring out the full tithe of your produce for that year, and store it within your towns; [so that] the Levites, because they have no allotment or inheritance with you, as well as the resident aliens, the orphans, and the widows in your towns, may come and eat their fill.*

Tithing was initially established as payment in kind to provide food for the priests of the Hebrew people. The priests all came from the tribe of Levi, and the law of Moses commanded that they should not possess lands or properties, so that they could dedicate themselves exclusively to the worship of God. The tithes were also used to help the poorest people, usually identified in the Bible as “the orphans and widows” because of the great economic and social vulnerability of these two groups.

Jesus did not counsel people to pay tithes

Jesus did not recommend paying tithes, and the priests accused him of not paying them himself. His severe criticism of the Jerusalem Temple and the priestly caste clearly implied a rejection of the heavy burden of tithes. One of the principal jobs of the “merchants”, whose tables Jesus overturned when he irrupted into the Temple with a whip, was converting into the special coinage used exclusively in the sanctuary all the Greek and Roman coins that the pilgrims brought to the Temple to pay their tithes to the priests.

Every Israelite man over 20 years of age was obliged to pay several tributes annually to the Temple: two drachmas or two denarii (equivalent to two days’ wages), the firstfruits of their harvest or of the fruits of their labor, and the so-called “second tithe”, which was not paid to the Temple but had to be spent in Jerusalem on food, lodging or objects.

On many occasions and for many reasons Jesus criticized the Pharisees, who had a fanatical obsession with the observance of religious laws, including the paying of tithes. On one occasion Jesus threw in their face that they were paying tithes even on “mint and rue and herbs”, but they were neglecting the more substantial matter of justice and love toward their neighbors.

Following Jesus, the first Christian communities eliminated the payment of tithes and supported the community by sharing among everybody whatever possessions they had.

The church became rich through tithing

When Christianity became the official religion of the Roman empire, the biblical law of tithing regained its place in society. The bishops, meeting in the regional councils of Tours (567) and Macon (585) revived the obligation of tithes, which had to be paid to the bishops and parish pastors. In the 8th century the emperor Charlemagne established the obligatory tithing of harvests for the support of bishops and local churches.

Tithing played an important role in the Roman church's accumulation of wealth. During the middle ages all the property owners were obliged to give a tenth part of their production or their income to the hierarchical authority of the local church, under pain of excommunication or threat of damnation in hell. In the time of Gregory VIII (12th century) the "tithe of Saladdin" was established: it was to be paid by all Christians who did not participate in the crusades against the Muslims.

In colonial America the tithes were paid to the authorities of the local churches for the support of pastors and parishes. This obligation ceased at the time of independence.

Tithes are still being paid

In several European countries which are traditionally Christian but now under civil law (Spain, Germany, Italy), there still exists an "equivalent" to the tithe, namely, the "religious tax" that is given to the state when one pays the personal income tax. These funds are dedicated to financing the Catholic and Protestant churches. For some years now Spanish citizens who are critical of the actions of their clergy have promoted an "apostasy campaign" in order to avoid financing the Catholic Church through their taxes. They free themselves from paying the religious tax by officially renouncing, in a formal document, their membership in the Catholic Church.

Presently, as a result of the increase in biblical fundamentalism and literal reading of the Bible, some evangelical churches, especially the Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal, have revived the practice of tithing, making it a condition of true faith. As if in a commercial transaction, the pastors and preachers assure their faithful of blessings and "prosperity" from the hand of God, in exchange for their payment of tithes.

Tithing is a fraud

Gary Amirault is an evangelical pastor and preacher from the U.S. He is also a defender of Christian universalism and a founder of Tentmaker Ministries in Missouri. He takes part in our program since he is the author of several books in which he describes the historical origins of tithing and the lack of any New Testament basis for requiring it. In one of these books, *The Tithe is Abolished*, he explains that *the sects that tithe most are those that evangelicals call "cults": Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, and the Church of God; in fourth place would be the Assemblies of God.*

Amirault concludes his lengthy text by stating that *what they call today "biblical tithe" is nothing but a great swindle, a complete fraud.* The book also tells how *U.S. churches, through their thousands of schemes for collecting money, have accumulated more than a trillion dollars in stocks, bonds, mutual funds, insurance plans, real estate, etc. Just the interest they pay for the mortgages on their buildings could literally feed all the poor people in the world. The deceptive means used by thousands of pastors to raise money, one of which is the modern tithe, have drained our country of resources that could bless and benefit the world tremendously. But the church is perched on top of all that money.*

Interview 70
CHARGE FOR THE SACRAMENTS?

RACHEL Emisoras Latinas continues its coverage of the second coming of Jesus Christ to earth. Right now we're leaving a Pentecostal church and going to visit another Christian denomination. As you see, Jesus, there are a lot of churches in the land where you once lived.

JESUS Do they charge tithes in this church too, Rachel?

RACHEL I don't know. I don't think so, … but perhaps they charge for other things. Hold on a minute, Jesus. … Look what's happening there. A wedding! They're celebrating a wedding.

JESUS Delightful. I always liked weddings. How do they celebrate them now?

RACHEL Want to find out? Let's go to the church office and tell them that you and I want to get married.

JESUS All right, let's go.

RACHEL Pay attention, listeners, to this special report, which will be based on top-notch journalistic investigation. Jesus, when the sacristan comes out, you tell him you're my fiancé. You speak first.

SACRISTAN How can I help you folks?

JESUS Let's see, my friend. This young woman and I are going to be married, and we want to know what we need to do.

SACRISTAN Do you have all your papers in order original birth certificates, prenuptial medical exams, national identity card, residence certificate?

JESUS Yes, we have them.

SACRISTAN Baptismal and confirmation certificates, prematrimonial course certificate, two witnesses?

RACHEL We have everything ready.

SACRISTAN Very well. Then, how do you want to get married? With mass or without? With hymns or just with musical accompaniment? With complete floral arrangement or just partial? Do you want photographs taken? We have different possibilities, and the pricing varies a great deal. How much are you able to pay?

JESUS Nothing. We don't have any money. But we do have love. Right, Rachel?

SACRISTAN But what is it you want then?

RACHEL We want to get married. Nothing more. Without flowers, without altar, without music. We want God to bless our love. Just that.

SACRISTAN But … that can't be.

JESUS Why can't it be, my friend?

SACRISTAN Please don't waste my time. Posted outside there are the rates for weddings, baptisms, recited masses, sung masses, masses for the dead, responsorials, first communions, confirmations …

JESUS If we don't have any money, you won't marry us?

RACHEL But who do you people think you are? You look decent enough, miss, but your fiancé looks, I don't know, … he looks like a hippie, or a Rastafarian, … or a Palestinian terrorist! Get out of here, both of you!

RACHEL Well, listeners, that puts an end to our journalistic investigation. Did you see that, Jesus? Those people with their tithes, and these people with their charges for each sacrament.

JESUS But where did they learn those tricks, I wonder. Because I always told my disciples quite clearly give freely what you freely received.

RACHEL But if the priests don't charge for their services, how will they live?

JESUS Let them work, like any ordinary person.

RACHEL Did you disciples work?

JESUS Of course they did. If they didn't work, they didn't eat. Nobody ever charged for announcing God's Kingdom.

RACHEL Well, if I'm not mistaken, I think it was the same apostle Paul who said, "Those who preach the Gospel should earn their living by the Gospel."

JESUS Well, if those who explained it to me are right, Paul himself never charged anything, because he worked with his hands; he made tents in order to pay for his travels.

RACHEL So you're against charging for masses and the sacraments?

JESUS I think that those who do that are not pastors but mercenaries. They are not caring for the sheep, they are being cared for by them.

RACHEL But what if the sheep make voluntary contributions, if they give alms to the church?

JESUS It's the church that must give alms; it shouldn't receive them. In our group, anyone who had a little more shared with someone who had less. And there was always enough to go around.

RACHEL And so?

JESUS And so let's get out of here, Rachel. I don't think we can get married!

RACHEL A frustrated marriage, but a revealing investigation. From Jerusalem, this is Rachel Perez for Emisoras Latinas.

MUSIC

ANNOUNCER Another God is Possible. Exclusive interviews with Jesus Christ in his second coming to Earth. A production of María and José Ignacio López Vigil, with the support of the Syd Forum and Christian Aid.

INTERVIEW 70: BACKGROUND MATERIAL

The right to charge

The Catholic Church recognizes seven sacraments or sacred rites by which the faithful officially receive "God's grace": baptism, confirmation, penance, eucharist, sacred orders, matrimony, and blessing of the sick. Only men who have received the sacrament of sacred orders (that is, priests) can administer the sacraments. They also can charge for them; at the present time they usually charge for five sacraments, all except penance. In earlier centuries there were charges, and very high ones, even for penance, through the sale of indulgences and in other ways.

In what is called the Code of Canon Law, the official law of the Catholic Church, canon 1264 establishes that the bishops of each place have the right to *determine the offerings which are to be made for the administration of the sacraments and sacramentals* (sacramentals include the blessings of persons and locales, exorcisms, certain prayers, expositions of relics, etc.).

The Catholic Encyclopedia states: *Every priest ordained with a title of ecclesiastical service has the right to require of the bishop, and the bishop has the obligation to give him, a remuneration for ecclesiastical service that guarantees him sufficient means to live a respectable life; in the exercise of this service, the priest has the right to charge the sums assigned to his ministry, including the offerings which legitimate custom allows him to receive, or even demand, on the occasion of certain specific celebrations (mass stipends, priestly rights for burials, etc.).*

Paying for receiving: for and against

At the present time the principal reason that is given for charging for the sacraments is that many priests do not have any other economic means to support themselves, since they are serving poor communities. Those who defend charging for the sacraments also claim that, even though these rites bring “spiritual grace” and therefore should be performed gratis, the priests charged with administering them should receive support from the faithful. They cite Paul’s First Letter to the Corinthians (9,13-14), arguing that the payment is not for the sacrament as such, but for the support of the person who administers it.

Other argue that the charge is not for the sacrament itself – which has value, but no price – but for the extraordinary costs which the parish incurs in the celebration of some sacraments, especially baptisms and weddings, since a main consideration for families is the social projection they may want to give these celebrations.

Some parishes do not charge fees, but simply ask for a voluntary donation. Others specify that whatever is charged is used exclusively for the maintenance of the temple, not for support of the priest. In still others it is recommended that a receipt be requested for any payment made, with the aim of being accountable and transparent in the use of the money collected. Many dioceses make clear that nobody should ever be deprived of any sacrament for lack of funds to pay the fee.

In some religious cultures eliminating charges for sacraments turns out to be rather difficult. In his book *Is Latin America Turning Protestant?* (Berkeley, California, 1990; there is also a digital edition), David Stoll relates what happened with Leónidas Proaño, the bishop of Riobamba, Ecuador, and a man who sought out many ways to make the church of his diocese more coherent with Jesus’ message. When he asked his priests to stop charging for the sacraments, he found himself faced with strong resistance from the conservative priests, who were the majority and who depended on these charges as a fixed source of income. Not only that, but also the poor Catholic faithful, mostly Quechua Indians with a very traditional way of thinking, opposed the move: they believed that the sacraments would be of “no use” to them – they would not produce their sacred effect – if they did not pay for them.

In more modern, renewed sectors of the church, the priests themselves have been against charging for the sacraments, and in many places the lay people have taken on the role of parish administrators, in a gesture of collective responsibility. In order follow better the counsel of Jesus, to give freely what they have freely received (Matthew 10,8), there are increasing numbers of priests who, in addition to ministering in a parish, also work as teachers or in various manual labors in order to support themselves economically.

Interview 71
ON THE ROCK OF PETER?

RACHEL Today Emisoras Latinas travels to the north of Palestine, to Banias, the place where the city of Caesarea Philippi once stood, at the foot of Mount Hermon. With us again is Jesus Christ, who must recognize this place he once visited with his disciples. Isn't that true, Jesus?

JESUS Yes, we came here once.

RACHEL And it was here, right here, in this magnificent setting, that you pronounced one of the most decisive declarations in the history of religion.

JESUS Did I really? What I seem to remember is that James and Peter and John were arguing, as always, about when the Messiah would arrive and which of them should sit at his right hand…

RACHEL And it was at that moment that you chose Peter you gave him the primacy and made him the first Pope in history.

JESUS As far as I recall, I didn't give anybody anything.

RACHEL Let me refresh your memory you said, "You are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church." Do you remember now?

JESUS The thing is, I can't remember because…

RACHEL Because what?

JESUS Because I didn't really start any church. I never even used that word, "church".

RACHEL There must be some error, because you handed over the keys to him.

JESUS What keys?

RACHEL The ones you gave Peter that day. The keys for opening and closing. You gave all power to Peter, the power to bind and to loose in heaven and on earth.

JESUS I don't mean to disappoint you, Rachel, but …

RACHEL So you didn't found a church?

JESUS Of course not. Among other things, because I thought the world was going to end soon, that God was about to arrive in power. Why would I have given him the keys? Why would I have founded a church?

RACHEL But the world didn't end.

JESUS Yes, I realize that. I was wrong in that regard.

RACHEL But you couldn't have been wrong in naming your successor, Peter, Cephas, the Rock. "The gates of hell shall not prevail against it." Here it is right here, Matthew, chapter 16. Hold on a moment, we have a call… Yes? … The researcher Pepe Rodríguez from Spain? You want to give your opinion? … Go ahead.

PEPE I'm listening to your program, and I call to tell you that Jesus is correct. He never said those words.

RACHEL He never said, "You are Peter and upon this rock … "?

PEPE If you look carefully, that saying appears only in the gospel of Matthew. If it were such an important statement, would Mark, Luke and John have forgotten about it?

RACHEL What are you driving at, Pepe?

PEPE It's a text that was added afterwards.

JESUS Ask him why it was added.

RACHEL Jesus is asking why they had him say something that he never really said.

PEPE They included it some years before the famous Council of Nicea, and they did so in order to elevate the church of Rome above all the other Christian churches, such as the ones in Antioch, Alexandria, Constantinople and Jerusalem.

JESUS So they're trying to put other people's words in my mouth? Listen, the only stone, the only Rock, according to the psalm I prayed when I was a boy, is God himself.

RACHEL Thank you, Pepe Rodríguez. May we call you again for other consultations?

PEPE I'd be delighted. Give my best to Jesus.

RACHEL Till the next time, Pepe. What our audience most definitely wants to know now, Jesus, is exactly what it was you said when you were here in Caesarea.

JESUS The same as what I was saying everywhere, Rachel that nobody is worth more than anybody else. And if someone thinks he's greater, then he should bow himself down and serve others.

RACHEL We're going to take a break, but our listeners can be sure that we're not going to leave this here. With keys or without keys, there are still a lot of doors that we have to open.

I'm Rachel Perez, reporting from the ancient Caesarea Philippi. You can find us on the web at www.emisoraslatinas.net.

MUSIC

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INTERVIEW 71: BACKGROUND MATERIAL

Peter, the Rock

Jesus gave Peter, the fisherman from Capernaum, the nickname "Rock" ("Cephas" in Aramaic). Many gospel stories portray Peter, the brother of Andrew, as the disciple that was closest to Jesus. The gospels tell us more about him than about any other disciple, offering even details that reveal his personality: passionate, rash, impulsive, cowardly, and boastful. The narratives of the Acts of the Apostles show the authority Peter had in the first community in Jerusalem, and they speak also of his visit to the Antioch community. Many scholars, however, doubt that Peter ever went to Rome, even though by the end of the first century there existed a tradition that he had been a victim of Nero's persecution there.

Peter's historical protagonism and that later attributed to him, as well as the tradition of his dying in Rome, provided the basis for the primacy of Peter which was ably and opportunistically fabricated in the course of centuries by many ecclesiastical figures, with the aim of elevating the Roman church over other Christian churches and communities.

The Jerusalem community, led by James, the brother of Jesus, was the center and heart of the primitive church. After the destruction of Jerusalem by Roman troops in the year 70, however, the church of Rome quickly undertook to impose its authority. The scandalous history of the hegemony of Rome and the Roman Papacy is treated concisely and splendidly in theologian Hans Kung's book *The Catholic Church* (Modern Library, 2003).

From bishop of Rome to powerful Pope

By virtue of his capabilities as a man of power and of laws, Leo I was the bishop of Rome (440-461) who can really be considered the first Pope. He was the first to adjudicate to himself the pagan title *Pontifex Maximus* (Supreme Pontiff), which had been discarded by the Byzantine emperor. Leo I was the first to be buried in the monument which the Roman emperor Constantine had had built in memory of Peter's martyrdom.

In the sixth century the emperor Justinian built in Constantinople the Church of Holy Sophia ("Hagia Sophia", "Divine Wisdom"), the largest and most magnificent temple of all Christendom. This only served to heighten the distrust, the rivalry and the tensions that already existed between the western church, headed by the Pope in Rome, and the eastern churches.

Starting in the fifth century, the Popes sought to reinforce Roman power throughout Christendom by resorting to a scheme of forgeries, the most outstanding of which was the Donation of Constantine, whose bogus nature was proved only ten centuries later. According to this famous forgery, the church of Rome had been granted full primacy over the churches of Constantinople, Antioch, Alexandria and Jerusalem.

The sudden appearance and rapid expansion of Islam in the seventh century diminished the importance of the eastern patriarchates of Antioch, Alexandria and Jerusalem. It also helped to reinforce Roman primacy and aggravated the rivalry between Rome and Byzantium, between West and East, between the Pope of Rome and the Patriarch of Constantinople. In 1054 a definitive break took place between the two churches, and the Roman pontiff, invoking history (by means of the famous forgeries) and the will of God (which the Pope claimed legitimized that history), ended up as the central figure of Christendom for all of Europe. Many centuries later the same thing happened for all of Latin America. And so it is until this very day.

Romanization: five processes

According to theologian and church historian Hans Küng, it was during the papacy of Innocent III that Romanization of the church reached its culmination and was consolidated in “five superimposed processes” which have remained as characteristics of the Roman system in the Catholic Church until today. These five processes are: centralization, legalization, politicization, militarization and clericalization.

Küng describes these five processes as follows:

Centralization: The absolutist papal church declares itself to be a mother. The early churches and the eastern church had originally been conceived in terms of fraternal relations, devoid of any centralist authority over other churches.

Legalization: The Catholic Church in the west developed its own law, completely centered on the Pope as absolute pontiff, legislator and judge of Christianity, to whom all other Christians, including the emperor, were subordinated.

Politicization: The Roman church claimed dominion over the world. Through the papacy the western church presented itself as a completely independent legislative body of the highest level, and at times it also gained nearly complete control over the secular powers.

Militarization: The western Christian church was militaristic and summoned people to a “holy war”. The Augustinian theory on the legitimate use of violence to obtain spiritual ends allowed violence to be employed as a method for expanding Christianity.

Clericalization: The western church was controlled by celibate men. The celibate clergy was totally separated from the Christian people, above all by their not being married.

Reading the Bible objectively and critically

For our program Spanish journalist and researcher Pepe Rodríguez discusses the saying, *You are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church* (Matthew 16,18), which is endlessly repeated and proclaimed by the Catholic hierarchy to back up their claim that the Roman church is "Peter's successor". According to Rodríguez, this verse was not original to Matthew's gospel, but was added to later versions. In the four gospels there are many such later "additions".

Often we hear believing Christians, both Catholics and Evangelicals, defending very narrow positions by referring to "what God's word in the Bible says". But we must ask: how was that oral tradition put into writing? How were those words translated and divulgated? The first thing we must be mindful of is that all the books of the Bible were written, copied, read, studied, discussed, decided, translated, published, classified, preached, circulated and explained by men, by males. This is the first major bias we must take into account when determining what was "added" and what was "suppressed".

Furthermore, none of those books was written at the same time the events being narrated were actually occurring. After many long years, sometimes centuries, of oral tradition, somebody finally undertook to write down what "happened", or rather how it was remembered to have happened, and in the process details were added, changed, suppressed or modified.

We must remember also that for centuries all the books of the Bible, in their Greek and Latin versions (the only languages officially recognized), were interpreted and controlled exclusively by the church hierarchy, which excommunicated anyone who translated the Bible into other languages "understandable" to people not familiar with Greek or Latin. Martin Luther, in his protest against papal practices, caused a genuine revolution when he translated the New Testament into German in 1522, and did the same with the Old Testament in 1534. From that time on Protestants began to read the Bible directly and became ever more knowledgeable about it. In the last third of the 16th century, Fray Luis de León was condemned by the Spanish Inquisition for his "barbaric custom" of translating the Bible into Spanish.

Since in Catholicism "divine authority" lay with the Pope and not the scriptures, people did not read the Bible. Reading the scriptures, or even having a Bible, was considered suspicious. Latin was the "sacred" language, and all other languages were "profane". What was sacred "could not be understood", it shouldn't be understood, and so it became more "mysterious". Four more centuries had to go by before the Vatican would recommend that Catholics read the Bible.

The Bible: texts have to be read in context

All this, and much more besides, should be taken into account when we read the Bible. The Bible is not a recipe book for morality nor is it a science textbook. It does not explain to us everything we should know, nor does it tell us how we should act in all the situations that life presents us with. The Bible cannot regulate our lives, although some of its books can serve to inspire us because of their literary beauty or the strength and profundity of their messages, symbols and myths.

The Bible is a collection of books of greatly varying importance, written in very diverse styles and presented to us in good and bad translations. There are many contradictions among the many books, which were written in different times and contexts and with very different purposes in mind. To

read the Bible intelligently one has to be “suspect” of the ways scriptural texts have been interpreted in the past and are still being interpreted – it is necessary to take some distance from many of these interpretations. Before these biblical books reached our hands they had a long and complex history, which we must know about to understand them. We will find our reading of the Bible profitable only if we read its texts in their true context. If we ignore the context of these texts, we can easily end up with simplistic conclusions, or even with fanatical and inhumane ideas, all of which are contrary to the message of Jesus.

Let us pray for the fall of the church

The papacy is the central organ of the Roman Catholic Church, a powerful institution with a monarchical structure and an aristocratic style. The papacy is a human creation that has been consolidated in the course of centuries through ambition, greed and violence, the usual mechanisms of power. How is it even possible to imagine that the papacy could have been established by Jesus of Nazareth, who always preached service, equality and “horizontal” human relations and who passionately opposed all abuse of power, especially abuse committed in God’s name? For that reason alone, more careful exegesis allows us to conclude that verse 16,18 of Matthew, referring to the “primacy of Peter”, was a late addition to the gospel, clearly intended to confirm the bishop of Rome, who claimed, for reasons of power, to be Peter’s successor.

So great is the abyss that any sensible person may discern between the Roman church and the movement of Jesus of Nazareth, and so great is the obstacle that that church represents for a sound spirituality that Catholic theologian Eugen Drewermann has written: *Just as Jeremiah prayed for the fall of Jerusalem, so should we pray for the fall of the ecclesiastical institution, so that God can begin as soon as possible to write on the hearts of human beings what he really wants to tell them.*

Interview 72
WHO FOUNDED THE CHURCH?

RACHEL We continue our broadcast from Banias, the site of what in Jesus' time was Caesarea Philippi. The nonstop calls from our startled audience have prevented us from leaving the place. Mr Christ?

JESUS Yes? Rachel?

RACHEL I see that you're a simple person and don't take yourself too seriously. The greatest proof of that is that our little network, Emisoras Latinas, has gotten these exclusive interviews with you without paying anything. All the same, one church that claims to represent you – I'm referring especially to the Catholic Church – is quite pompous and ostentatious. It has palaces, estates, communications media, banks – it's an empire.

JESUS As I told you before, I have no part in all that. I announced the coming of the Kingdom of God, but I'm realizing that what really came was the church.

RACHEL Well, that's my question. How could "all that" come about? How is possible that something so grandiose could emerge out of the preaching of a simple peasant?

JESUS What don't you put that question to that fellow Pepe, the one who called the other day? He has the same name as my father and seemed to know a lot about these matters.

RACHEL Hold on a minute while I call him … Pepe Rodri'guez? Yes, here we are calling again from Emisoras Latinas. We find ourselves with lots of questions. If you allow me, today I'm going to ask you some classical journalistic questions.

PEPE Go right ahead.

RACHEL Tell us, if Jesus Christ did not found the Church, then who founded it?

PEPE The Roman emperor Constantine.

RACHEL And when did he found it?

PEPE In the fourth century, the year 325.

RACHEL And where did he found it?

PEPE In his house, in his residence at Nicea, to the east of Constantinople.

JESUS Rachel, give me a chance to ask a few questions now. Tell me, Mr Pepe, how did that fellow Constantine go about setting up such a church?

PEPE After your death, Mr Christ, some Christian communities arose. Since you had said that the world was going to end soon, they sold all that they had, they shared it among the poor, and they prepared for the end. They shared everything; they were united in one heart and one soul.

JESUS If that's what they did, then they really understood what the Kingdom of God was about.

PEPE Yes, but since you delayed your second coming so long, they had to get on with their lives. It's a long story. The Jerusalem community disappeared when Rome burned the Temple. Christianity kept spreading through the whole Roman empire. That empire, which you had some experience of, persecuted the Christians.

JESUS Just as they persecuted me.

PEPE Up to that point, at least, all was going well.

JESUS And what happened? At what point did the lamp get hidden under the bushel basket?

PEPE In later centuries the Roman empire was growing weaker. When Constantine took command, even though he was not a Christian, he made up the story that he had seen the sign of the cross in the sky and that he had gained the throne thanks to you.

JESUS Thanks to me?

PEPE Yes, and he also said that he wanted to convert to Christianity.

JESUS And did he convert?

RACHEL Constantine was a chameleon He realized that Rome's power was declining and needed a strong ideology to shore it up. For him the Christian religion, which by then was extended throughout the empire, served that purpose well.

JESUS And tell me, what did that man actually do?

PEPE He made a pact. He called the principal bishops and told them if you obey me, nobody will persecute you any more. If you just declare that the murderers of Jesus were the Jews and not the Romans, then I will declare Christianity to be the official religion of the empire.

JESUS But how could that be? The man who condemned me to death was Pontius Pilate, a Roman.

PEPE You're wrong, Mr Christ, it was not Pontius Pilate. The one who killed you was Constantine.

JESUS Constantine?

PEPE Yes, Constantine. He's the one who murdered you.

JESUS Go ahead, keep talking…

RACHEL No, no more now, because my phone card is out of minutes. I'll call you back in a short while, Pepe. Friends of Emisoras Latinas, stay tuned and don't miss out on this fascinating history. This is Rachel Perez, reporting from Banias, the site of the ancient Caesarea Philippi.

MUSIC

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INTERVIEW 72: BACKGROUND MATERIAL

The Kingdom of God, not a Church

Jesus did not found any church. In fact he never once used the word "church" (the Greek word in the New Testament is *ekklesia*, meaning "assembly"). It was never his intention to organize a church or any institution. He led a collective movement of men and women who proclaimed the arrival of God's Kingdom, which meant a world of just and equitable relations, where poor people ceased to be poor; a world of communities that included women and cared for and healed the sick.

Some years after Jesus died, it was Paul who transformed Jesus' movement, originally just Jewish and rural, into an urban religion that was capable of becoming "universal" and attracting adherents very different from the Jews among whom Jesus of Nazareth moved. It can therefore be said that the one who actually "founded" the church was Paul, since he organized the movement of Jesus along doctrinal and practical lines that allowed it to appeal to the non-Jewish "gentiles" who inhabited the vast Roman empire.

"Christian" communities, "Catholic" Church

In the earliest period the small, spirited communities of the movement started by Jesus called themselves "the people of the Way". Only later, in the church at Antioch (a city in what is now Syria), did they begin to be called "Christians". By the beginning of the second century, also in Antioch, a hierarchy with three grades was established within the communities: bishops, presbyters (priests), and deacons.

When Christianity became the official religion of the Roman empire in the fourth century, the word "church" began to be used to designate both the communities of the followers of Jesus and the places where they met together. It was at this time also that Latin became the official language of the liturgy, the theology, and the incipient legislation of the western church. Until then Greek had been the

language that predominated in the Christian rites, although the communities in Jerusalem and Galilee spoke Aramaic, which was also the language Jesus spoke. The dominance of Latin was one of the factors that contributed to the Roman church's ascendancy over the other churches.

The expression "catholic church" was used for the first time by Ignatius, bishop of Antioch, in the first century, but he used the term not to give primacy to any particular church, much less the Roman one. For Ignatius the expression meant "the totality of the church" and referred to all the communities that then existed and to the unity among them all.

A variety of Christian churches

Although Jesus did not found a church, the Christian churches proclaim and teach that he did. These include the Catholic Church; the various Orthodox churches, which separated from the Catholic Church in the 11th century; and the numerous churches which were born of the Protestant reformation in the 16th century and which in turn have, in the last century, given rise to evangelical, Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal churches. Each of these Christian churches claims to be a "creation" of Jesus Christ, an institution founded by him or authorized to him, since (they claim) he would have desired them to exist and to function as they actually exist and function today.

Ecumenism is a movement that seeks unity among all the Christian churches. It seeks unity in diversity, since in the course of the centuries all these churches, though they claim to have common objectives, have diversified the contents of their faith in Jesus and have been in rivalry with one another, even to the point of shedding blood.

Outside the church (the Catholic church!) "there is no salvation"

In the first chapter of the document of the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) which condemns the Albigensians, there appears this clause: *There is only one universal Church of the faithful, and outside it absolutely nobody is saved.* In 1302, after the eastern churches had broken away from Rome, Pope Boniface VIII ratified that same doctrine in his bull "Unam Sanctam", which begins: *Outside the Catholic, Apostolic Church there is no salvation and no pardon of sins.*

This doctrine prevailed during the following centuries, even after the separation of the churches that arose out of the Protestant reformation. In 1854 Pope Pius IX repeated the teaching: *By faith we must hold that outside the Roman Apostolic Church no one can be saved, that this is the only ark of salvation, and that anyone who has not entered it will perish in the flood.*

Among the Christian churches, it is the Catholic Church which has always insisted on being the one truly "founded" by Jesus Christ, the "only one" that guarantees the plenitude of "salvation". After the Church had adamantly affirmed this for centuries, the Second Vatican Council in the 1960s recommended a more ecumenical posture and recognized the values that could be found in non-Catholic Christian churches.

Nevertheless, in more recent decades the Roman Catholic hierarchy has regressed to the arrogant, exclusivist idea of being the "one true church". This was expressed clearly in the year 2000 by Cardinal Ratzinger, then head of the Sacred Congregation of the Faith, in the document "Dominus

Iesus", which was widely criticized everywhere by both Catholic and non-Catholic theologians. Contradicting the ecumenical movement that was gaining ground throughout the world, this Vatican document reaffirmed that *the faithful are obliged to profess that a historical continuity rooted in apostolic succession exists between the Church founded by Christ and the Catholic Church. This is the only Church of Christ.*

After that lamentable document's release, a group of European theologians commented on it as follows: *"Outside the Church there is no salvation," claimed Saint Cyprian, bishop of Carthage, in the third century. The only true Church is the Catholic, declares the Roman pontiff in our day. But the Second Vatican Council nuanced these principles in 1965 when it proclaimed religious liberty to be one of the fundamental human rights. This bold thesis opened the way to interreligious dialogue and facilitated important advances toward a convergence of the many churches which trace their origin to a Jew who was crucified by the Romans two thousand years ago.*

Despite the criticism that this document aroused, the idea that the Roman Catholic church is the one true church was ratified again in July, 2007, by the same Ratzinger, now made Pope Benedict XVI. This was done through another document of the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith, which states that the Catholic Church is *the only church of Christ; [furthermore,] the only church established by Christ on earth subsists in the Catholic church, which is governed by the successor of Peter and the bishops in communion with him.*

The unity of all Christians will never be attained through the ideas and attitudes reflected in documents such as these.

First Christian Roman emperor

Constantine was convinced that the Roman empire was in crisis and needed to be unified under a single philosophy and a single chain of command, and also under a single religion. With his keen sense of political opportunism, the emperor decided to attribute a major military victory to the God of the Christians and to the sign of the cross, which he claimed to have seen in dreams. In the year 312 his army had defeated that of his rival Maxentius at the Milvian Bridge, which crossed the Tiber River into Rome. This victory, which made him the Roman emperor of the west, supposedly came through the sign of the cross: *In hoc signo vinces.*

The following year, 313, Constantine issued the Edict of Milan, establishing religious liberty throughout the empire. In 315 he abolished crucifixion as a punishment for crimes. Starting in that same year he began to "Christianize" the Roman laws, to donate land to Christian bishops, and to transfer civil powers to them as well. He also undertook the construction of Christian temples, *all of them worthy of our love for the grandiose*, as Pope Eusebius wrote to him. Many of the new temples were built on the ruins of the temples of the Roman religion, which he ordered destroyed. The only temple of ancient Rome that survived and was not made into a Christian temple was the Pantheon (a temple to all the gods), which had been built in the first days of the empire. This *building of angelic, not human, design*, as Michelangelo described it, even today amazes tourists who visit it.

In the year 321 Constantine introduced Sunday as a religious holyday and allowed the Christian church to possess patrimonial properties. In 325 Constantine became the single emperor of both the

western and the eastern empires. He then convoked the Council of Nicea, which gave Christianity juridical legitimacy in the Roman empire and also “defined” the “creed” of the official religion, including the correct doctrine concerning the nature of Jesus Christ. Constantine died in the year 337, after being baptized a Christian on his deathbed.

When his successor, the emperor Theodosius, in the year 380 issued the Edict of Thessalonica, prohibiting all pagan cults and sacrifices, Christianity become the state religion, the church of Rome became the state church, and heresy against the church of Rome was deemed a crime against the state. It was consummated: the church had been founded.

“Jesus will rise up from the tomb of this church”

Millions of Christians around the world hope and pray for a change in the Church; they believe that “another Church is possible”. But will a Church founded on the basis of power be able to change? Will it be able to recover its origins in the movement led by Jesus of Nazareth?

In his book, *Religion without Magic* (Ediciones El Almendro, 2006), Spanish theologian Juan Luis Herrero del Pozo introduces his reflections with these bold words: *Magical ways of thought become ingrained in the religious sensibilities of all times. They are like the insidious advance of termites: by the time they are noticed, they have already destroyed thousands of galleries and hollowed out the beams of the building to the point of collapse. The entire organization of the Christian churches, the whole framework of their dogmas, sacraments, laws and structures is being gnawed away by the rot of magic; it has no future. The inevitable collapse of the Church inspires us to hope that we will see blooming again in the desert the revolutionary witness of the Teacher of Nazareth. To paraphrase theologian Paul Tillich, “Jesus will rise up from the tomb of this church.”*

Interview 73
WHO WAS CONSTANTINE?

RACHEL Emisoras Latinas continues its broadcast from the ancient Caesarea Philippi. Our press department has put together an identikit, that is, a narrated portrait, of the Roman emperor Constantine, whom we now realize was the real founder of the Christian church. Beside us now, as in our previous programs, is Jesus Christ.

JESUS I'm very curious to know more about this fellow Constantine. I think I'm beginning to see a wolf in sheep's clothing.

RACHEL According to the information we have, Jesus, he looks more like a wolf in wolf's clothing. Let's see, … Constantine, … a cruel and bloodthirsty character. He massacred entire populations throughout Europe. In the Roman circuses he had his enemies thrown to hungry beasts. He cut the throat of his son Crispus. He murdered his father-in-law. He also killed his brother-in-law. He had his wife Fausta boiled alive. Should I go on?

JESUS And you say that fox, who was worse than Herod, founded the church?

RACHEL Once again we have established contact with our advisor Pepe Rodríquez. Pepe, in an earlier program you spoke to us about a pact between Constantine and some bishops.

PEPE Yes, that's right. By means of that pact Christianity, which had been the religion of the downtrodden, became the state religion, the only official religion of the Roman empire. Constantine donated huge estates to the church and had magnificent temples built, using public funds. And some three centuries after Jesus Christ, in the year 325 to be precise, he convoked the sadly famous Council of Nicea.

RACHEL But aren't the councils supposed to be convoked by the Popes?

PEPE This one was convoked by the emperor. And to add insult to injury, the bishop of Rome, who was in a dispute with him, wasn't even invited to attend.

RACHEL And what was Constantine after with this council?

PEPE He wanted to control the church and have it at his beck and call. There would be only one empire, the Roman; only one church, the Roman; and only one God, the one imposed by Constantine.

RACHEL Why do you say that, Pepe?

PEPE Because in that council Constantine defined who you were, Mr Jesus Christ.

JESUS Who I was?

PEPE Yes. In Nicea they approved the famous dogma of the Blessed Trinity, which affirmed your consubstantiality with the Father. The creed that is recited even today in the churches was not inspired by the Holy Spirit; it was formulated by Constantine.

JESUS Remember, Rachel, all we talked about the last few days? I told you so. I didn't have anything to do with all that.

RACHEL And that creed was approved by the bishops?

PEPE Actually, nobody approved anything because Constantine had the first word and the last word in everything. He declared that all churches refusing to submit to the church of Rome were heretical. He decreed that those who did not accept the decisions of the Council of Nicea should be persecuted and even put to death. The Church went from being persecuted itself to being a persecutor.

RACHEL And the bishops didn't react?

PEPE Some did, yes. But they were exiled. Others were poisoned. The Council ended with a great banquet offered by Constantine in honor of the bishops who were in attendance. The emperor gave them expensive gifts and named them to public posts with good salaries, all financed by the imperial treasury.

JESUS Everything you're telling us … is a complete abomination.

PEPE That's why I said that it was Constantine who murdered you, Jesus Christ. In Nicea they buried your message and brought to birth the Holy Mother Church, Catholic, Apostolic and Roman. Above all, Roman.

RACHEL Any more information for us, Pepe?

PEPE You can make your identikit complete by saying that while he was alive Constantine had himself called "Supreme Pontiff", "beloved commander of God", "Vicar of Christ". He ordered that when he died he should be buried as "apostle number 13".

RACHEL Thank you, Pepe. That's enough for today.

JESUS Yes, quite enough. Sufficient to the day is the evil thereof.

RACHEL This is Rachel Perez, reporting for Emisoras Latinas from Caesarea Philippi.

MUSIC

ANNOUNCER Another God is Possible. Exclusive interviews with Jesus Christ in his second coming to Earth. A production of María and José Ignacio López Vigil, with the support of the Syd Forum and Christian Aid.

INTERVIEW 73: BACKGROUND MATERIAL

A criminal

The Roman emperor's "conversion" to Christianity can be understood many ways, but most likely it was a skilful way for him to conceal his crimes. That's the interpretation of the German theologian and philosopher Karlheinz Deschner in the first volume of his *Criminal History of Christianity* (Editorial Martinez Roca), an essential reference work for knowing the face of the church that has been hidden by the official history: *This monster Constantine was a cold-blooded, hypocritical killer who cut his son's throat, strangled his wife, murdered his father and his brother-in-law, and kept in his court a gang of bloodthirsty, servile priests, just one of whom would have sufficed to put half of humankind in conflict with the other half, forcing them to slaughter one another.*

A "saint"

Despite his criminal background, the emperor Constantine was venerated as a saint by the Christian church out of gratitude for his having made Christianity the official religion of the Roman empire. The cult of this new "saint" spread rapidly, above all in the eastern churches and in the parts of Italy where the Byzantine influence was greatest. In the present day the Eastern Orthodox churches venerate Saint Constantine, and there are even icons which portray him as a saint with halo and all; he is pictured alongside his mother, who is venerated as Saint Helen. The Orthodox churches celebrate the feast of the mother and her son on May 21st. The Catholic Church venerates only Saint Helen, on August 18th.

Tradition attributes to Saint Helen, the mother of Constantine, the discovery of the locations of Calvary and of the "holy sepulcher", the place where Jesus was buried. She is also credited with the discovery in the year 326 of the "true cross", the wood on which Jesus was crucified. These traditions are really just pious legends. The year before, 325, Constantine had asked Bishop Makarios to search for those "holy places", but the locations determined by Makarios and Helen are very questionable, even though they are the ones that modern-day devotion still venerates. Within a century after the death of Jesus the Jerusalem that he had known was totally altered: the Temple was destroyed in the year 70, and the kingdom of Judea ceased to be a political entity after the final uprising of the Zealots in the years 132-135.

Builder of temples

A little after the battle of the Milvian Bridge, the emperor Constantine gave Pope Sylvester I the Roman palace that had belonged to the emperor Diocletian, so that he could build a Christian temple there, which indeed he did. That temple is today called the Basilica of San John Lateran. In the year 324, when Constantine finally reunified the western and the eastern empires and became the sole emperor, he had another Christian temple built on Rome's Vatican hill, the place where Peter was martyred, according to tradition. Many centuries later that temple was vastly expanded. Today it is called the Basilica of Saint Peter.

As sole emperor, Constantine rebuilt the city of Byzantium and called it “New Rome”. He built Christian temples there and placed the city under the protection of Christian relics, specifically, fragments of the supposed “true cross” of Jesus and the even more hypothetical rod of Moses. After the death of Constantine New Rome was called Constantinople, “the city of Constantine.”

From persecuted to persecutors

When Christianity was declared to be the only religion of the Roman empire, Christians went from being persecuted to being persecutors. They waged a criminal persecution against the “pagan” priests and worshipers who belonged to religions which till that time had cohabited peacefully in the empire. In the same year 324, after Constantine allowed the Christian cult to be freely practiced in all the empire, the Christians in Dydima, Asia Minor, ransacked the oracle of the god Apollo, tortured the priests of that cult, and destroyed the temples on Mount Athos.

In the year 354 an imperial edict authorized the destruction of all pagan temples and the execution of all “idolaters”. Five years later, in Skythopolis, Syria, the Christians set up a “concentration camp” where they detained, tortured and executed “pagans”, whom they arrested in all parts of the empire.

The emperor Theodosius, who succeeded Constantine, made Christianity the exclusive religion of the Roman empire and decreed that *all nations subject to our clemency and moderation must continue to practice the religion that was given to the Romans by the divine apostle Peter.* From that time on non-Christians were officially characterized as “repugnant, heretical, stupid and blind.” In one of his imperial decrees Theodosius forbade anyone to disagree with any of the church’s dogmas, which were already beginning to take form and to be disseminated throughout the empire.

The destruction of the Library of Alexandria and the murder of Hypatia

In the year 391 zealous Christians, led by the patriarch Theophilus, burned all the texts in the Library of Alexandria, the most famous of the ancient world; it had over a half million handwritten manuscripts, original texts that contained all the science that had been accumulated over centuries.

Some years later, in 415, the patriarch Cyril, who succeeded Theophilus, destroyed the library building itself and encouraged the Christian hordes to kill in a most cruel way the wise woman Hypatia, who was the library director and a professor of mathematics, algebra, geometry, astronomy, logic, philosophy and mechanics. She also invented the astrolabe and the hydrometer, and according to some scholars she was a precursor of the astronomical theories of Kepler, Copernicus and Galileo. She was without a doubt the last great scientific mind of antiquity.

The Christians of Alexandria, however, were fanatical and they had power; they considered all Greek knowledge to be irredeemably heathen, since it did not come from the Bible. The obliteration of the Library of Alexandria meant the loss of approximately 80% of Greek science and civilization, as well as the loss of extremely important legacies of the Asian and African cultures. Alexandria was the intellectual center of antiquity, and the destruction of this treasury of human knowledge caused a stagnation of scientific progress that lasted more than four centuries.

The crimes of the “Galileans”

In the year 528 the emperor Justinian ordered the execution of all those who practiced “sorcery, divination, magic or idolatry” and proscribed all the teachings of pagan authors and “those suffering from the blasphemous madness of the Hellenes”. The following year Justinian closed down the Philosophical Academy of Athens, where Plato had once taught.

In his magnificent work *Julian: a Novel* (1964), the American writer Gore Vidal recreates the intolerance that followed on Christianity’s becoming the official religion of the empire after Constantine’s “conversion”. Vidal reconstructs in literary fashion the sentiment of that epoch, recounting the persecutions and crimes committed by the Christians (whom Julian always called “Galileans”) against the pagans and describing the ambience that prevailed before the end of the Roman empire. The novelist narrates the story from the perspective Julian (331-363), who was Constantine’s son-in-law, the last of that dynasty and the last Roman emperor who sought to restrain Christianity and restore Hellenistic culture.

Interview 74
THE POPE INFALLIBLE?

RACHEL Emisoras Latinas returns now to Capernaum. Here, on the foundation of what was once the house of Simon Peter, the fisherman, has been built a monumental church in the form of a boat. Inside we can still make out the old doorway through which you must have passed many times, Jesus.

JESUS Yes, we used to meet here with Peter and his family. Peter was one of my best friends. He was stubborn and as boastful as could be, but he was a great man.

RACHEL And above all, infallible.

JESUS Infalli-what?

RACHEL Infallible. He could never be wrong.

JESUS What do you mean, he couldn't be wrong?

RACHEL Well, Peter, as the first pope of the church, could never have been wrong, because they say that the popes are infallible.

JESUS But what are you saying, Rachel? Every person born of woman makes mistakes sometimes.

RACHEL I stand corrected. Infallibility works only when the popes speak "ex cathedra", from their chair, seated on their throne, and about questions of faith and morals. You didn't know that?

JESUS No. I have no idea what you're talking about.

RACHEL Well, I have the documents right here. Listen. Pius IX. Pius IX again. First Vatican Council. They all agree the popes of Rome, as successors of Peter and as representatives of Jesus Christ on earth, cannot be wrong.

JESUS But I myself was wrong many times! I thought the world was going to end soon. I thought that I wouldn't die before seeing the coming of God's Kingdom. And let's not even talk about Peter. He was wrong more than he was right!

RACHEL But infallibility is a revealed dogma, or am I wrong?

JESUS Revealed by whom?

RACHEL I don't think I could tell you that.

JESUS And the Pope himself is not mistaken when he says he's never wrong?

RACHEL No, because he's infallible when he says he is infallible.

JESUS Well, that's a joke I haven't heard before.

RACHEL Are you laughing at the dogma?

JESUS I'm laughing at reeds shaken by the wind, because they think they're cedars of Lebanon. How can any human being, who comes from dust and returns to dust, say he's never wrong?

RACHEL Well, that's what the bishops and cardinals decided – on July 18th, 1870, to be precise.

JESUS And what if somebody thinks that those who claimed they weren't wrong were actually wrong?

RACHEL That somebody would be outside the church. And according to the church, outside the church there is no salvation.

JESUS Oh, is that the way it is?

RACHEL Hold on, we have a call… Yes, hello?

RESEARCHER Emisoras Latinas? I'm listening to your program with great interest, and I'm delighted to know that Jesus Christ thinks the way I do and can laugh about these things. Would you like to know where those illusions of grandeur originated?

RACHEL Of course we would. All instructive information is welcome.

RESEARCHER Let's see what you think of this document I'm going to read. It's quite direct. Listen closely "No one on earth can judge the pope. The Roman church has never been mistaken and will never be mistaken until the end of the ages. Only the Pope has authority to depose bishops, emperors and kings. All princes should kiss his feet. A pope is holy through the merits of Peter."

JESUS That's an even better joke! Ask him who uttered such craziness.

RACHEL Jesus Christ wants to know who said what you just read.

RESEARCHER It's the famous "Dictatus Papae"; it comes from the eleventh century. So you see, Jesus Christ, long before the dogma was officially declared, the popes believed themselves to be infallible. That craziness, as Jesus describes it so well, was written by Pope Gregory VII.

JESUS My friend Peter was a braggart, but the insolence of that Gregory fellow wins a prize!

RACHEL So if I understand you well, Jesus, you don't believe in the infallibility of the Pope.

JESUS Neither of the Pope or of anybody. Only God is True.

RACHEL Well, then … the only infallible thing I'm left with is my watch, and it tells me it's time to bring our program to a close. This is Rachel Perez from Capernaum. And on the internet at www.emisoraslatinas.net.

MUSIC

ANNOUNCER Another God is Possible. Exclusive interviews with Jesus Christ in his second coming to Earth. A production of María and José Ignacio López Vigil, with the support of the Syd Forum and Christian Aid.

INTERVIEW 74: BACKGROUND MATERIAL

From devil's work to dogma of faith

The infallibility of the Pope was already being preached in the middle of the 13th century by a famous French Franciscan, Peter Olivi. Almost a century later, his concept was declared heretical by Pope John XXII, who described it as "the devil's work". Nevertheless, six centuries later another Pope and some bishops made it into nothing less than a dogma of faith.

The text of the dogma reads thus: *In order to maintain the Church in the purity of the faith handed on by the apostles, Christ, who is the Truth, desired to confer on his Church a participation in his own infallibility. By means of the "supernatural sense of faith", the People of God "are indefectibly united to the faith" under the guidance of the living Magisterium of the Church. The pastoral office of the Magisterium is thus oriented to assuring that the People of God remain in the truth that sets them free. To fulfill this service Christ has bestowed on the shepherds the charism of infallibility in matters of faith and customs. … The Roman Pontiff, head of the episcopal college, enjoys such infallibility by virtue of his ministry when, as Pastor and supreme Teacher of all the faithful who confirms his brothers in the faith, he proclaims a doctrine of faith or morals by a definitive act. … This infallibility covers the whole deposit of divine Revelation.*

The roots of infallibility

Pope Gregory VII, author of the "Dictatus Papae" mentioned by the researcher who called Emisoras Latinas, governed the Church from 1073 to 1085. By that time Rome was the major political power in Europe.

The "Dictatus Papae" proclaims openly, for the first time in the history of the Roman church, not only the papacy's absolute power, but also the identification of power with truth and the definition of power as truth. Gregory VII declared the Pope to be the Sole Pontiff of the church and of all believers, clergy, bishops, churches, and councils. The Pope was the Supreme Lord of the World, to whom

kings had to submit since they were “human beings and sinners”. Gregory claimed for the Roman church, which he ran, unlimited competency in legislation, administration and justice.

One hundred years later Pope Innocent III, a man of power and out for power, ratified his predecessor’s arrogance by declaring: *Every cleric must obey the Pope, even if he is commanded to do evil, since no one can judge the Pope.* Some analysts of church history believe that, of all the men who have reached that high post, Pope Innocent III was one of the most criminal. He was involved in the slaughter of the Albigensians, the beginning of the Crusades and the establishment of the Inquisition.

From the time of Gregory VII and Innocent III, the papacy’s power never stopped growing in arrogance, ambition, or monopolization of power. In 1651 Thomas Hobbes stated in his famous work *Leviathan*: *The papacy is nothing but the specter of the disappeared Roman empire, on whose tomb it displays its crown.*

Opposed to all modern advances

With the proclamation of the dogma of infallibility, the late 19th century saw the culminating point of the long process of papal exaltation. By then the papacy had lost control of the so-called Papal States, and Pope Pius IX (1846-1878) convoked the First Vatican Council in 1870 to try to regain his prestige and power.

Previously, in 1864, Pius IX had issued the “Syllabus of Errors”, which condemned practically all the scientific, philosophical and theological advances by which modern thought had moved beyond the medieval vision of the world, a vision that for centuries was fiercely defended by the popes. Among the “errors” condemned were pantheism, rationalism, laicism, democracy and liberalism.

How the dogma of infallibility came about

The most polemical document of the many promulgated by the First Vatican Council was the Dogmatic Constitution “Pastor Aeternus”, which defined papal infallibility; it was approved on July 18th, 1871.

In that Council, of the 1,050 bishops with the right to participate some 774 were present. There was much resistance to the proclamation of the dogma of infallibility among many of the bishops, especially the Germans and the French; especially strong in their opposition were Felix Dupanloup, bishop of Orleans, and Karl Joseph Hefele, bishop of Rottemburg. It has been shown that the bishops were not allowed to engage in debate, that they were prohibited under pain of mortal sin from speaking publicly about what was happening in the meeting hall, that the elections were manipulated, and that those who did not agree with the dogma were threatened. It is related, for example, that 55 bishops left Rome in protest before the vote was even taken and that the French bishop Lecourtier felt so depressed by what he had seen that he threw his council documents into the Tiber River and left the city – he was subsequently stripped of his bishopric.

A rejected dogma

One of the notable voices most critical of infallibility was that of German historian and theologian Ignaz Von Dollinger, professor of ecclesiastical history and laws in Munich. Renowned for his erudition, eloquence and literary talent, Dollinger had published a year before the Council his monumental work, *The Pope and the Council*, in which he argued that the Papal States were not essential to the Church.

Critical of the papacy and its temporal power, he refused to accept the dogma of papal infallibility when it was proclaimed. In 1871 he published a letter addressed to the archbishop of Munich, saying that as "a Christian, a theologian, a historical researcher and a citizen," he refused to accept the dogma Three weeks later he was excommunicated by the archbishop.

As part of the strong reaction against the dogma of infallibility, a schism developed in Europe, which resulted in a dissident group called the Old Catholics. The first communities of this breakaway group arose in Germany, Austria and Switzerland, and the movement eventually extended to other countries of Europe and America. Today these Old Catholics recognize the Pope as the bishop of Rome, but they do not accept his infallibility. The Old Catholic communities ordain married men as priests, they make priestly celibacy optional, they allow divorce, they forbid abortion, and they leave decisions about family planning to the consciences of the couples involved.

From the time of the Reformation, begun by Martin Luther in German in the 16th century, Protestants have not recognized the authority of the Pope or that of the councils of bishops; much less do they recognize the Pope's infallibility. For Protestantism the supreme authority lies with the scriptures. The Orthodox Christian churches do not recognize the Pope's primacy of authority or his infallibility, although they do concede to the Pope a primacy of honor for being the bishop of Rome.

Interview 75
MIRACLE-WORKING SAINTS?

JESUS From Jerusalem to Capernaum, then from Capernaum back to Jerusalem. We never stop, Rachel. From here to there and then …

RACHEL Are you really tired?

JESUS No, to the contrary. I love getting to know people and places.

RACHEL Well, get ready for what you're going to meet up with now. Excuse me a second, the studios are asking me to sign on… Ahem… Friends of Emisoras Latinas, here we are back again in Jerusalem. The streets of the Christian quarter are overflowing with people, and the churches also are full of …

JESUS Full of what, Rachel?

RACHEL Come with me, Jesus. Let's go into this church. I want you to see something and give me your opinion.

JESUS Okay, you've aroused my curiosity.

RACHEL Come on, let's go in.

GUIDE Welcome, vous parlez anglais, espagnol ou allemand?

JESUS What's he saying?

RACHEL English, please.

JESUS No problem. Are you tourists?

RACHEL We're doing a special report for Emisoras Latinas; it's called "Images of Saints in the Holy Land."

GUIDE Magnificent! We have many images, and they're very beautiful. Come, let's begin with the smaller altars.

JESUS Who is this guy?

GUIDE Here you have Saint Gregory Nazianzen, a saint who performs many miracles.

RACHEL Why kind of miracles does he do?

JESUS He's especially good for when you've been bitten by a dog or a snake or some other harmful animal.

JESUS What about this … this doll?

GUIDE Doll! That's Saint Apollonia, patroness of dentists. She brings relief from toothaches.

JESUS She cures teeth?

GUIDE You have to light one of those little candles, see here? An offering, a prayer, and that's it! Come over here. This altar is dedicated to Saint Agueda.

RACHEL And what does this saint cure?

GUIDE Women pray to her when they have problems in childbirth.

JESUS Seems to me that each saint has a specially assigned job.

GUIDE That's the way it is, sir. In the sacristy we have others, there's no room for them all here. Saint Blas is the protector of throats, Saint Lucy is for the eyes. You pray to Saint Barbara for protection from storms. Saint Pascual Bailon is the patron saint of cooks, and Saint Joseph is the patron of a good death.

JESUS My father Joseph?

GUIDE Saint Jude Thaddeus is recommended for impossible causes. And this is Saint Anthony, one of the most powerful saints; he can find any object that's lost.

RACHEL He's also good for finding a boyfriend, right?

GUIDE Yes, but in that case the single women stands him upside down so that the saint does his work quickly.

RACHEL That's true. That's what my granny did.

GUIDE Right now we are looking for an image of Saint Isidore of Seville – he will be the patron saint of the Internet.

RACHEL The Internet already has a patron saint?

JESUS Correct. You know, Saint Isidore was a great scholar. He studied everything, he was a walking encyclopedia, a wikipedia, just like the Internet itself.

RACHEL And perhaps his miracles could serve as a celestial antivirus?

JESUS No doubt about it, miss.

JESUS Excuse my ignorance, friend. She's from around here, but I come from far away.

GUIDE Yes, go on.

JESUS Could you explain to me how making petitions to these saints yields results?

GUIDE It's quite simple. For example, you, sir, have a problem. You then ask for a miracle from the saint you're devoted to. The saint passes the request to the Virgin Mary, who is the mediatrix of all graces. Mary passes it on to her son Jesus Christ, just as she did at the wedding of Cana…

JESUS Yes, the wedding at Cana, I remember…

GUIDE What's that you said?

JESUS No, nothing.

GUIDE As I was explaining to you, you make your request to the saint, the saints asks the Virgin, the Virgin asks Jesus, and Jesus resolves it with God the Father.

JESUS And why do you have to go through all those steps in order to reach God?

GUIDE God has too much work, pal. He has a lot of things to attend to. The saints are his secretaries, they help him out. Does that settle your doubt?

JESUS Not really, but …

GUIDE Do you want to visit the sacristy?

RACHEL No, I think we have enough already for our report. Here's a tip for you.

GUIDE May Saint Christopher guide you!

RACHEL You seem troubled, Jesus.

JESUS Don't you see how they're taking advantage of needy people, women who have problems, folks who are sick? They say that this is the house of God, and they've filled it with idols; they've made it into a den of con artists. Let's go out to the street, come on.

RACHEL So we'll take a break and be right back! From Jerusalem, reporting for Emisoras Latinas, this is Rachel Perez.

MUSIC

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INTERVIEW 75: BACKGROUND MATERIAL

Without images

Since first Christians were brought up according to the Jewish religion, they naturally followed the commandment of Moses: they did not use religious images in their worship or for their devotions. God was to be worshipped, as Jesus had taught, “in spirit and in truth”. And Jesus himself was not “worshiped” as such; rather, he was “remembered” or “commemorated”, and this was done precisely by the way Christians announced his message and shared all their possessions in common. However, this imageless tradition gradually changed as Christianity spread throughout the Roman empire, which had many polytheistic traditions and an abundance of beautiful images and imposing sculptures of the gods. The cult of images in the Christian church has clear pagan roots.

With icons and images

In the first centuries of Christianity an effort was made to distinguish between an idol, which represented pagan ideas, and an icon, which represented divine realities. By the third century cemeteries, churches and chapels were being decorated with images of biblical figures. From that time on images gained ever greater space in Christian tradition. The Byzantine church was the place where icon art began to develop in all its splendor.

Opposition to images

In the 8th century iconoclastic (literally, icon-breaking) groups arose in the eastern church in opposition to the proliferation of images and icons; they were totally against the cult of images, which was growing beyond reasonable bounds. The iconoclasts aimed to restore the idea of an intangible, inexpressible God, who could be sought and found only by faith. There followed tense controversies and even violent wars. At the present time we still call “iconoclast” anyone who tries to destroy “idols”, that is, society’s formalized concepts and its established patterns and prejudices.

The iconoclast wars were won by those defending the cult of images. The Byzantines, heirs to the Hellenistic culture which had created such beautiful sculptures of the gods, remained faithful to their rich tradition. Byzantine Christian art, such as the icons of the Russian and Greek Orthodox churches, is especially expressive and beautiful. The iconoclast wars did not affect Ethiopian art, which was influenced by a blend of Egyptian majesty and African aesthetics and is unique in the world for its Byzantine reminiscences.

How many commandments remain?

The Church’s official doctrine tried to put an end to the iconoclast dispute. Arguing from the “incarnation” of the Son of God, the Second Council of Nicea (787) justified the veneration of the

images of Christ, Mary, the angels, and the saints, and it decreed that such veneration was not contrary to the faith, nor could it be considered idolatry.

Since the second commandment of Moses' Decalogue (Exodus 20,4-5) expressly prohibits making images *of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth* (not to speak of prostrating oneself before them), the Catholic Church opted for the simplest solution: it eliminated this commandment, which is in fact the longest of all of them, from the catechism. Since that excision left only nine commandments, the church decided split in two the very last commandment, concerned with not coveting what belongs to others. The ninth commandment became "You shall not covet your neighbor's wife", and the tenth "You shall not covet your neighbor's goods." Problem solved. It was now possible to keep talking about the ten commandments and still render idolatrous worship to images.

The Catholic position meant a complete break with the Judaism in which Jesus was brought up, which was a religion that absolutely rejects idols, finding God first and foremost in the words of scripture.

Islam also prohibits all graphic representations of the divine, and Protestant tradition firmly rejects the Catholic cult of images.

The value of images

Up to the present time many centuries of art history have been filled with glorious images of Jesus, Mary and the saints. Making them all simply the equivalents of idols is not correct or sufficient. We can find a bit of everything in the countless examples of sculpted, carved, painted and engraved images. They include both authentic marvels and examples of terrible aesthetic taste. These images range from art works of ineffable beauty, which contribute to humankind by giving meaning to religious emotions, to the grossest examples of commercialism and manipulation of people's credulity by claiming that certain images have curative or miraculous powers.

For centuries Catholic catechesis did little or nothing to reorient such veneration, which has sometimes expressed itself in almost idolatrous fashion. At the present time Catholic hierarchs fill their churches with images, and they continue to promote processions, parades and exhibitions of "miracle-working" saints. Their aims are both economic – collecting alms, promises, votive offerings, donations – and ideological: they seek to control people's consciences by tying them to these cults, which are run by priests and have clearly superstitious traits.

Interview 76
A SAINT-MAKING FACTORY?

RACHEL We renew our transmission from outside the church of Saint … No, it's better if we omit the identity of the place to avoid recriminations. Jesus Christ, who is here beside me, still seems surprised by what we saw inside the church, which is not very different from so many others, full of statues and images of saints. What do you think of all that, Jesus?

JESUS It's idolatry. Adoring images is idolatry.

RACHEL Well, Catholics claim they don't adore them, they venerate them.

JESUS Venerate? I'm not familiar with that word, but it seems to be the same thing. Instead of speaking to God, who dwells in their heart, they kneel down before a piece of wood.

RACHEL We have a call…. Yes, hello?

ANDRÉS Hello, this is Andrés Pérez Baltodano. I'm calling from Canada.

RACHEL Do you wish to offer an opinion, Mr Baltodano?

ANDRÉS I'd just like to say to Jesus Christ that the problem is not with the word, the verb "venerate", but with something more substantial.

RACHEL And what is that?

ANDRÉS It's the "substantial" income that the Catholic Church receives with this business of the saints.

RACHEL Don Andrés, could you explain yourself a little better?

ANDRÉS In case Jesus is not aware of it, the saint-making factory has still not been shut down.

RACHEL The saint-making factory?

ANDRÉS In that church you just entered you saw some old-time saints, saints from other centuries. But just during the pontificate of John Paul II there were manufactured, I mean, there were canonized no fewer than 464 new saints, more than in all the previous five centuries!

RACHEL And what do we need so many saints for? Don't we have enough already?

ANDRÉS The thing is, the saints keep the people on their knees, and besides that, they increase the Vatican's finances.

JESUS That “besides” is what I don’t understand.

ANDRÉS Making a saint is a complicated process, Jesus. You need witnesses, tribunals, experts, demonstrated miracles, examination of the corpse to see if it decayed or remained incorrupt. Pursuing the cause of a saint can take years and years.

RACHEL And that costs a lot of money, right?

ANDRÉS It’s very expensive, and that money goes straight to the Vatican vaults. Just think of this one detail of every hundred saints canonized in the course of history, only five were poor people. The immense majority were princes, kings, queens, bishops, abbesses, … Their friends and family paid a fortune for them to be made saints. Nowadays the saint-making factory is much more organized nobody reaches the altars without having some powerful institution behind them.

JESUS May I ask you a question, don Andrés?

ANDRÉS Of course, Jesus.

JESUS Why do they go through all that?

ANDRÉS The canonization process?

JESUS Yes, that process which is so costly.

ANDRÉS To show that the saint is in heaven, at God’s side.

JESUS But that’s looking for treasure where there isn’t any. The saints aren’t in heaven, they’re on earth!

RACHEL Now I’m the one who doesn’t understand.

JESUS The saints are here among us. They are people of flesh and blood. The women who spend their lives helping their children get ahead – those are the saints. The impoverished farmers who are laboring in their fields from before dawn – they’re saints. The good people who fight for justice, who place God and their neighbors above money – those are the real saints.

RACHEL But they always told us that the saints are people who die and then perform miracles from heaven.

JESUS No, the saints are still alive. And they perform miracles when they give us good example. My father Joseph was a saint, but not because of that little crown they put on the statue of him there in that church, but because he was just until the last day of his life.

RACHEL But … And if people who are still in the world are saints, what should we call the others, the ones who are already with God?

JESUS That … that's something you should ask God.

RACHEL Many thanks to the friend who called from Canada. And thanks also to so many saints who are certainly part of our great audience here at Emisoras Latinas. From Jerusalem this is Rachel Perez reporting.

MUSIC

ANNOUNCER Another God is Possible. Exclusive interviews with Jesus Christ in his second coming to Earth. A production of María and José Ignacio López Vigil, with the support of the Syd Forum and Christian Aid.

INTERVIEW 76: BACKGROUND MATERIAL

"They reign together with Christ"

The Catholic Church is the only Christian denomination that has a formal juridical and administrative mechanism for establishing that someone is a "saint". The one who makes the final determination is the Pope. The purpose of "canonizing" someone (making him or her a saint) is to present the person to the faithful as an example and a model to follow.

In the earliest centuries the "saints" were venerated as such by popular acclaim, the "vox populi". Later on, to avoid abuses, the bishops agreed that they would be the ones who decided which persons were to be declared "saints" in their respective dioceses. Starting in the year 1234 that power to name saints was reserved exclusively to the Pope. In 1588 Pope Sixtus V put the process in the hands of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, one of the many structures of the Vatican bureaucracy. In the 16th century the Council of Trent reaffirmed this doctrine: *The saints, who reign together with Christ, present their own prayers for human beings before God. It is good and useful to beseech them in prayer in order to receive the support, aid and protection they can provide through their prayers and to receive, even more, God's grace.*

A long and costly process

The process for making a saint is long, costly and complicated. It begins when a bishop, a religious congregation or some other institution presents to the Vatican a report on the life of a person whom they wish to be declared a saint. The Vatican investigates the life, the virtues and the defects of the person, and it seeks the opinions of others. If after due examination it decides that there are no objections, then the person begins to be called "servant of God". In order to pass to the second stage, that of being a "blessed", the person is submitted to further investigation as regards his or her virtues, and there must be at least one miracle (generally, certified healings) attributed to him or her. Occasionally it is considered a miracle when the corpse of the candidate to sainthood has remained

incorrupt, and this is given serious consideration by the Vatican. According to some studies, the Catholic Church has recognized 102 corpses as being preserved miraculously incorrupt.

After the beatification, the final step of the process is “canonization”, which occurs after another miracle has been certified by the Vatican tribunal – it is almost always the curing of some disease. That is when the Pope proclaims that the person is a “saint”. Canonization means that the person is “elevated to the altars”: the faithful can venerate and pray to him or her, a feast day is assigned in the calendar of liturgical celebrations, images and holy cards can be made of the saint, and his or her relics can be distributed to the faithful.

The cult of the saints

The exaggerated cult of the saints in the Catholic Church is evident in a great number of churches, which appear more like “Olympuses”, mountains of the gods, because of the proliferation of virgins, saints and even “Jesuses”. Such a style of veneration discloses archaic religious conceptions which predate Christianity.

The Babylonians, for example, had around five thousand gods and goddesses. They believed that those divinities were heroes who had lived on earth and worked wonders and that after death had passed to a higher existential plane, where they were able to continue acting on behalf of humans. Each day of the year was protected by one of those deities, and every situation in life required the assistance of one of them. Every group and organization had its special protector or patron. With some variations these ideas and practices appeared in all the religions of the ancient world, and they are very similar to the ones that can be seen in the Catholic cult of the saints. There are thousands of saints (five thousand in the official list), and they function as patrons of all kinds of places and all types of professions; they are advocates in the most dissimilar kinds of situations. It can therefore be stated that within Christian monotheism there survives a kind of ancient polytheism, which is especially evident in this deep-rooted veneration of the saints.

The Catholic cult of the saints results in dogmatic contradictions. In view of the veneration of the saints it may also be asked: Is this a type of cult of the dead or of spirits? Is it a form of spiritism? After all, those saints are all dead and buried, waiting the last times, the final judgment, and the promised resurrection. How then are we to invoke them? And if they are dead, how can they “reign with Christ” and “contemplate God”, such as is proclaimed when they are canonized? And how can they mediate and intercede before God, who is in a “place” different from where they are?

The costs of making a saint

It is not easy to calculate the finances needed to “manufacture” a saint, that is, to have the Catholic hierarchy in the Vatican officially declare that such and such a person is “with God”, is a “saint”, and therefore can be prayed to for miracles and favors – all that is what being a “saint” means in the Catholic world. There is not much information or much transparency about the real costs of these processes.

In this book *The Princes of the Church*, published in the 1980s, German historian Horst Herrmann states: *The Vatican does not invest a single lira in any canonization. It requires payment for*

everything, from the first compilations of acts till the festive papal mass with which the process concludes (just renting Saint Peter's Basilica costs ten thousand dollars). In his book *Making Saints* (1992), writer Kenneth Woodward calculates the total cost of a canonization at 250 thousand dollars minimum. Since the cost of living increases continually, the cost of "sainthood" does also. Writing a few years later, Charles Panati states in his *Popular Dictionary of Religious Objects and Customs* that the "approximate cost" of a canonization should be put at about a million dollars.

Naturally, Vatican finances are helped greatly by such "manufacturing" of saints. For those who want to have the founder of their religious congregation proclaimed a saint or for those who seek to promote the importance of somebody by having him or her declared a saint, it is just a matter of investment.

John Paul II: a historic record

During the 26 years of his pontificate, Pope John Paul II canonized more persons than were canonized by all the popes during the previous five centuries. John Paul added 482 new saints to the four thousand that already existed. He also beatified some 1338 persons, thus putting them on the road to "sainthood". The "specialist in saints" who participated in our program actually mentioned a smaller figure of new saints: 464 – a few saints more or a few saints fewer, the number is still a record.

Andrés Pérez Baltodano is a Nicaraguan who is a professor of political science in Canada. He participates in our program because of his lucid critique of what he calls the "providentialist vision" of religion and the "resigned pragmatism" promoted by a Vatican-controlled church. He has also done research on the consequences of this religious culture for the Latin American political scene.

In one of his articles Baltodano writes: *The posture of resigned pragmatism and the providentialist vision of power and history is reinforced more and more by the Vatican. The providentialism promoted nowadays by the Vatican is expressed, for example, in the scandalous number of saints that have been canonized by Pope John Paul II. The Vatican is making serious efforts to resacralize the world on the basis of providentialist ideas, since it canonizes only persons who "work miracles", that is, persons who confirm the view that a providentialist God acts directly in human history. In order to maintain its power, the Church has unfortunately decided to resacralize the world and to reinstitutionalize providentialism. It has decided that its power will be easier to sustain through a renewal of providentialism, and this worldview, in a rather perverse way, coincides nicely with the workings of the global market.*

The cult of the saints forms part of the "magic sense of life" that is part and parcel of the political culture of our Latin American countries. For most of our people natural phenomena and social and human events have a mysterious, impenetrable source: they are the product of extraordinary forces. In politics, this cultural trait is expressed in the tendency of people to have faith in the powers of whoever is the current political boss.

The saints live among us

To be holy or saintly means to make present in the world the Holy of Holies, God, the God of Jesus. It means making really present his goodness, his compassion, his justice. Being holy means being exemplary, being “like God”, revealing God’s presence in equitable human relations, in the “miracle” of sharing possessions, and becoming responsible for the inclusion of those who have been excluded. In the Church’s early tradition the “saints” were live, exemplary persons of flesh and blood who kept the project of Jesus alive within the Christian communities. The letters of Paul and Peter refer repeatedly to these “saints”. The cult of the saints, in which they are understood as intermediaries or “secretaries” standing between us and God, is something that came much later. It not only distorts the early understanding that the early Church had of the word “saint” but also warps the very image of God, reducing him to a sort of very busy monarch with a large team of servants at his beck and call.

Interview 77
THE EVANGELIZATION OF AMERICA?

RACHEL Emisoras Latinas is back on the air, transmitting our exclusive, controversial interviews with Jesus Christ in this his second coming to earth. Welcome once again, Jesus, to our microphones.

JESUS Thank you, Rachel, but today I have a complaint against you.

RACHEL Against me?

JESUS Whenever we talk, it's always you who ask the questions. Why is that?

RACHEL Well, … because … because I'm the interviewer and you're the one being interviewed.

JESUS Yes, fine, but we've been talking for so many days now, and I don't know anything about you. I don't even know where you were born. Tell me, where are you from?

RACHEL I was born in Peru, though my mother was Colombian and my father was from Bolivia.

JESUS Where are those nations? Are they in the lands beyond Egypt?

RACHEL Way beyond. How to explain it to you? They're on the other side of the world, crossing the ocean. Those lands are known as Latin America, and that's why our radio network is called Emisoras Latinas. Do you understand that?

JESUS I'm beginning to see…

RACHEL In fact, it's now the continent which has the largest number of your followers.

JESUS Really? And how did they hear my message if they live so far away?

RACHEL It's a long story. Do you want to hear it?

JESUS Of course, I'm quite interested.

RACHEL But better than my explaining it … Let me see if I have his telephone number here … Maybe I'll find him at home in Montevideo….

GALEANO Hello, yes?

RACHEL Eduardo Galeano?

GALEANO The very same.

RACHEL Look, Galeano, I'm calling from Emisoras Latinas, and we're broadcasting from Jerusalem. At my side is Jesus Christ.

GALEANO Jesus Christ?

RACHEL Yes, Jesus Christ in person. He wants to know how his message reached the lands of America.

GALEANO It's a very long story …

RACHEL That's exactly what I told him, but maybe you can abridge it a little.

GALEANO Well, you see, Jesus, the king and queen of Spain sent a certain Christopher Columbus to these lands, along with a bunch of adventurers.

RACHEL It was the discovery of America.

GALEANO Say rather the discovery of America's gold, because these lands didn't need to be discovered by anybody. They were already inhabited and developed.

JESUS And what happened with these new arrived people?

GALEANO They arrived with a lust for gold. Nothing and nobody was going to stop them in their search for gold and silver. Since they brought along gun powder, unfamiliar arms and unknown diseases, they wiped everything out. Entire populations were exterminated. They destroyed temples, cities, the cultures of our peoples. It was wholesale genocide.

JESUS Like the Romans used to do in my time. But what did all that have to do with my message?

GALEANO Well, what happened, Jesus, is that along with the invaders came the missionaries.

JESUS Missionaries with what kind of mission?

GALEANO They were your missionaries, with the mission of making all these people Christian. The soldiers wielded the sword, and the friars wielded the cross. They came to "evangelize" these lands, to baptize the "Indians", since that's what they called us.

JESUS And did the Indians want to be baptized?

GALEANO They had better want it, because otherwise they got their throats sliced.

JESUS And once they got baptized?

GALEANO Things got even worse, because then they were made slaves of the king of Spain. Their lands were taken away, their wives were raped, they were forced to work in the

mines, and they died in droves. But there was one great prophet, Bartolomé de las Casas, who condemned the atrocities committed in your name, Jesus.

JESUS In my name?

GALEANO Yes, in your name. You heard right.

RACHEL Do you have any idea, Mr Galeano, of how many people were living in America when Columbus arrived?

GALEANO They calculate there were 70 million people living here, but after a century and a half of conquest barely 3 million had survived.

RACHEL Are we hearing you right or…

GALEANO And the story doesn't stop there. Once the American Indians became scarce, they brought blacks from Africa. Men and women were torn from their lands, put in chains, and transported across the sea in ships. Their owners used to sell them like animals, and they whipped them to force them to work.

JESUS But how could they do such things? Weren't they children of God like the owners?

GALEANO Ah, they justified their actions by saying that the Indians had no souls, and neither did the Africans.

JESUS And did the missionaries also approve such brutality?

GALEANO Most of them did, because the trade in human beings was a very profitable business. How many did they bring over from Africa? Twenty million, 40 million? Nobody really knows. Half of them died on the high seas, and their bodies were thrown overboard.

JESUS What you're telling me, my friend, is something horrifying.

GALEANO America and Africa constitute Europe's great sin, Jesus. These lands were bled dry, and their veins were left open, … just like your own when you were nailed to the cross.

RACHEL Thank you, Eduardo Galeano. Do you have anything more to say, Jesus?

JESUS Not really, except to condemn the people who did all that. As an ancient scripture says, because of them is God's name blasphemed among the nations.

RACHEL Reporting from Jerusalem for all of Latin America, this is Rachel Perez.

MUSIC

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INTERVIEW 77: BACKGROUND MATERIAL

The cross came with the sword

During the conquest of America and the long centuries of Spanish and Portuguese colonial rule in the Americas, there were two distinct stances with regard to the indigenous cultures and religions. One was a total rejection of the native religions, with campaigns to root out idolatry, eliminate sanctuaries, abolish rites and customs, and satanize the cosmological experience of God. The other was a calculated substitution whereby native religious elements were replaced with more or less equivalent Christian elements: sacred books, feasts, rites, images, spaces, etc.

The adherents of both stances committed horrendous abuses and crimes of every type. The cross came with the sword. And behind the sword was the conquistadors' and the colonists' desire for gold, silver, lands and power. Thus the whole process of Christianization of the American continent was badly tarnished.

The same process took place somewhat later in the colonization of the African continent: the people were "evangelized", and African religions and spiritualities were suppressed, all for purposes of despoilment, exploitation and genocide. South African bishop Desmond Tutu expressed it succinctly and lucidly when he said: *When they came, they had the Bible, and we had the land. And they told us: Close your eyes and pray. And when we opened our eyes, they had the land, and we had the Bible.*

Five centuries later: an offensive speech

In the discourse with which he inaugurated the conference of Latin American and Caribbean bishops in Aparecida, Brazil, in May 2007, Pope Benedict XVI referred to the process of Christianization of America without making a single remark critical of what happened historically in past centuries.

That speech was an excellent expression of the insensitivity with which official Catholicism views that bloody historical process. The sentences that caused controversy and met widespread repudiation in all of Latin America were the following: *What has the acceptance of the Catholic faith meant for the peoples of Latin America and the Caribbean? For them it has meant knowing and receiving Christ, the unknown God whom their ancestors unknowingly sought in their rich religious traditions. Christ was the Savior after whom they silently longed. … The Holy Spirit has come to fecundate their cultures, purifying them and developing the many seeds and buds that the Incarnate Word had placed in them, and guiding them along the ways of the Gospel. The proclaiming of Jesus and his Gospel do not mean at any moment an alienation of the pre-Columbian cultures, nor was it the imposition of a foreign culture. …*

The dream of reviving the pre-Columbian religions, separating them from Christ and the universal Church, would not be a move forward, but a step backward. In reality, it would be a return to a historical moment rooted in the past. … The wisdom of the native peoples has fortunately led them to form a synthesis between their cultures and the Christian faith offered to them by the missionaries. From that synthesis was born the rich and profound folk religion in which the soul of the Latin American peoples is revealed.

One of the most horrible genocides

Among the many repudiations of the Pope's speech we highlight one, the "Position of the Confederation of Peoples of the Kichwa Nationality of Ecuador," which was emitted just two days after the Pontiff's provocative words. The document states the following:

If we analyze, with basic human sensitivity and without any sort of fanaticism, the history of the invasion of Abya Yala that was carried out by the Spaniards with the complicity of the Catholic Church, we cannot help becoming indignant. Certainly the Pope fails to see that the representatives of the Catholic Church of that time were, with honorable exceptions, accomplices, concealers and beneficiaries of one of the most horrendous genocides that humanity has ever witnessed. More than 70 million persons died in the concentration camps of mines, sweatshops, and forced labor. Whole nations and peoples were wiped out. Just the case of Cuba makes this clear. And to replace the dead Indians the Spaniards brought the black peoples from Africa, who suffered a most awful fate.

They usurped the riches of our territories in order to save Europe's economically bankrupt feudal system. Our women were raped in cowardly fashion, and thousands of children died from malnutrition and unknown diseases. They did all this under the philosophical and theological assumption that our ancestors "had no souls". And standing alongside the murderers of our heroic leaders was always some priest or some bishop, attempting to indoctrinate those condemned to death so that they would get baptized before dying and, of course, so that they would renounce their "pagan" philosophical and theological conceptions.

It is inconceivable that still in the 21st century some people believe that God can be conceived only as defined by Europeans. The Pope should know that, before Catholic priests came to our lands with the Bible, God already existed among our peoples, and his Word was always sustaining the Life of our peoples and of Mother Earth. The Word of God cannot be contained only in a book, nor can any religion be allowed to privatize God. We Aboriginal Peoples already had civilizations, with governments and social organizations structured according to our own principles. And of course, we also had our own religions, with sacred books and rites, but our priests and priestesses were the first to be killed by those who worked as servants of the "god of greed" and not the God of Love of whom Jesus the Christ spoke.

The Pope should be informed that our religions never died. We learned to syncretize our beliefs and symbols with those of the invaders and oppressors. We continue to congregate in our temples, because we know that beneath the main Catholic churches are the foundations of our own sacred temples, which were destroyed with the hope that the new buildings would bury our beliefs. But that was not the case, since our temples were build in those places which most concentrate the great

Forces that reflect the Power, the Wisdom and the Love of the Great Father and Mother Spirit of all the beings that inhabit this marvelous planet.

What remains to be said?

"Barbarous, incapable, inferior"

Every dominator despises those dominated, and he devalues and dehumanizes them in order to justify his domination. This was the case also when America was conquered by the Europeans. The Spanish conquistadors, validated by important thinkers in Spain, argued during the first decades of the 16th century that the "Indians" – the name given to the inhabitants of the recently "discovered" continent – had no souls and did not even belong to the human species. Because of their beastly condition, they could be deprived of their freedom and their lands.

The famous Spanish jurist and theologian Fray Francisco de Vitoria granted that the Amerindians had souls, but he held that they had no intelligence and so it was justifiable to dominate and rule them: *Those barbarians, though they are said to be not totally incompetent, are still so close to being mentally retarded that they would not seem to be suitable subjects for establishing and administering a lawful republic within human and political norms. For such an undertaking they do not have adequate laws or magistrates, and they are not even sufficiently capable of governing their families. They are lacking in sciences and arts, both of the liberal and the mechanical sort, and they have not developed agriculture or crafts, nor do they possess many of the other comforts that might even be considered necessary for human life.*

Another friar and theologian of that time, Fray Ginés de Sepúlveda, argued for waging a "just war" against the Indians since they were idolaters and sinners. Considering them to be inferior beings, he defended the obligation of the Spaniards to subject them: *With perfect right do the Spaniards exercise their dominion over these barbarians of the New World and the neighboring islands. In prudence, intelligence, and every sort of virtue and human sentiment they are as inferior to the Spaniards as children are to adults, as women are to men, as cruel and inhuman persons are to gentle souls, as the excessively dissolute are to moderate, sober persons – and finally, I must say, as monkeys are to men.*

The evangelizers

The evangelization process was as prolonged and complex as was the conquest and colonization of America, but there were also to be found among the evangelizers a few true Christians who, in the midst of the horror of the Indians' enslavement and the conquerors' greed, struggled to make the gospel of justice a living reality.

The most renowned figure was the Dominican friar, Fray Bartolomé de las Casas, who arrived in America at the age of 28, in the first years of the Conquest. Even though he received grants of land in Cuba, along with the corresponding Indian slaves, he renounced all these privileges. He became acutely aware of how anti-Christian was the system he was serving and committed himself to a passionate defense of the Indians. Las Casas crossed the Atlantic 14 times, traveling back and forth between America and Spain to denounce in his homeland what was happening in "the Indies" and to

refute the opinions of Spanish intellectuals who despised and belittled the Amerindians in their books, letters, sermons and pacification projects. *I´d prefer to be a live, unbaptized Indian than a dead Christian Indian,* was his cry. His best known work is the *Brief Report on the Destruction of the Indies*, addressed to the future king of Spain, Philip II. In this work he relates the horrors of the conquest, including the tortures and murders that took place and the assaults and humiliations that the native people of the continent suffered.

The tenacious efforts of Las Casas inspired a new law code for the Indies, which provided a certain protection to the native peoples. The great concern Las Casas had for the Indians, however, led him to suggest the importation of black slaves to replace the labor of the Indians, especially in the Caribbean islands, which were quickly depopulated by the devastating impact of the conquerors. Las Casas thought that the blacks were stronger than the Indians. Before dying he recognized his error and repented of having promoted such a horrendous alternative.

The slave trade

The Europeans who conquered the Americas were unable to find sufficient slave labor among the native populations, which ended up decimated in the very early years of the invasion as a result of forced labor, lethal arms and massive epidemics. It is calculated that of 70 million Native Americans who lived in the hemisphere at the time of the conquest, only 3 million were surviving a century and half later.

The scarcity of Indian labor gave rise to the large-scale slave trade which in the 16th century brought Africans to both North and South America, and especially to the Caribbean islands. Between the 16th and the 18th century there was a continual increase in the slave trade between Africa and America. From 1536 to 1848 the island of Goree, off the coast of present day Senegal, was the place from which millions of Africans were embarked, after being torn away from their families, on a one-way journey toward the unknown, and often enough toward death. At the forefront of the slave trade were the governments and merchants of Portugal and Great Britain, but Spain, France and the Netherlands also participated actively in this criminal business. All historians are agreed that this massive enslavement of Africans is what allowed Europe to accumulate the enormous wealth that made possible the development of capitalism and eventually the industrial revolution.

The blacks also have “souls”

Just as with the American Indians, the ideology that went along with the slave trade was racist, and it likewise provoke an “intellectual” debate about whether African, being black, had “souls” or not. In the countries participating in the slave trade, the Christian church authorities, both Catholic and Protestant, with a few honorable exceptions, approved of the trade, either by finding reasons to justify it or by keeping a complicit silence.

The estimates of the number of African slaves vary a great deal. There are scholars who speak of at least 60 million persons who were forcibly torn from their homelands. Some historians calculate that one quarter of the slaves died in the process of being captured, and another quarter died during the overseas journey. By portraying in graphic images a historical event that occurred in 1839 on a slave

ship, Steven Spielberg's movie "Amistad" (1997) reconstructs what those macabre journeys between Africa and America were actually like.

From the 7th to the 20th century, the Arab peoples also carried on a significant slave trade of Africans along the eastern coast of Africa, in proportions similar to or greater than the trafficking organized by the Europeans.

Starting in the 18th century, abolitionist movements, advocating an end to slavery, began to grow around the world,. In Latin America such efforts were linked to the struggles for independence. In Mexico it was the priest Miguel Hidalgo who in 1810 first abolished slavery, both of Indians and of Africans. The last two countries to abolish slavery were Cuba in 1886, while still under Spanish rule, and Brazil in 1888. Cuba's struggles for independence were closely tied to the rejection of African slavery, since it was the last Latin American country to become independent of Spain (1898) and one of those with the largest proportion of inhabitants of African descent.

Africa, the sin of Europe

We recommend the book *Africa, Europe's Sin* (Editorial Trotta, 2006), by the Salvadoran-Spanish economist and professor Luis de Sebastián. It analyzes the history and the consequences of Europe's presence in Africa from the middle of the 15th century until the present day, a presence that led to what the author calls the "derailing" of that continent. The book shows that there are many different historical reasons for Africa's being today the world's most impoverished continent, but that Europe has a special obligation to reflect on the causes that are related to its own "sin": the slave trade and the colonial exploitation. The book seeks to promote a process of "reparation" for that historical sin, especially now when the massive presence of African immigrants in Europe, especially in Spain, makes such reparation all the more urgent.

Eduardo Galeano

Galeano is a Uruguayan writer and impassioned chronicler of Latin American history, both ancient and modern. He participates in our program as one who knows well the horrors and the splendors of that history. There have been dozens of editions of his classic text, *The Open Veins of Latin America* (1971), in which he relates the history of Latin America from the times of the conquest and first evangelization, emphasizing the mechanisms of exploitation and pillage that have bled our continent dry. Another classic work of his, *Memory of Fire,* has also won awards and passed through many editions and translations. It is a magnificent three-volume mosaic of the key moments of Latin American history, which are truly unforgettable, but unfortunately little known.

Galeano's books are always full of solid research, keen analysis, beauty, humor and love. In one of them, *Upside Down: A Primer for the Looking-Glass World* (1998), he describes Latin Americans thus: *They say that we missed our date with History, and we have to recognize that we arrive late on all our dates. And that we have not been able to take power – and the truth is that sometimes we get lost on the way or we go in the wrong direction, and afterwards we give a long speech about the matter. We Latin Americans have a terrible reputation for being charlatans, vagabonds, troublemakers, revelers, and hot-tempered types, and there's no doubt good reason for it. They have taught us that, according to the law of the market, that which has no price has no value, and we know*

that our worth is not thought to be too high. Nevertheless, our fine instinct for business makes us pay for everything we sell and allows us to buy all the mirrors that betray our looks. For five hundred years we have been learning to hate one another and to work heart and soul for our perdition, and that's what we're doing; but we still have not been able to get rid of our passion for daydreaming and bumping up against everything – nor of a certain tendency for inexplicable resurrection.

Interview 78
UNIVERSAL ETHICS?

RACHEL Although we had trouble convincing Jesus to travel with us by plane to the southern part of the country, here we are, standing before this magnificent mountain range, at the foot of Mount Sinai. Have you been to this desert before, Jesus?

JESUS No, I only heard about this mountain from the stories the rabbi of my village used to tell.

RACHEL In these imposing wastelands Moses received from God the stone tablets of the Law with the ten commandments, and here he proclaimed them to the Hebrew people.

JESUS In my days, the teachers of the Law used to discuss which of the ten commandments was the most important. I told them that they could all be summed up in one loving your neighbor.

RACHEL And what about the first commandment, loving God?

JESUS It's the same thing, Rachel. Because if you don't love your neighbor, whom you see, you can't love God, whom you don't see. The Pharisees also used to delight in those discussions. For them ten commandments were too few. Moses said keep holy the Sabbath. Well, from that one commandment they invented a whole bunch more on the Sabbath you couldn't walk more than a league, on the Sabbath you couldn't cook, on the Sabbath you couldn't do a lot of things. I told them quite clearly the Sabbath is for people, not people for the Sabbath.

RACHEL So you dared to change God's laws?

JESUS The thing is, Rachel, they weren't God's laws, they were laws invented by the Pharisees. God does not load unbearable burdens on the backs of his children. The only thing that God asks of us is love and compassion for our fellow human beings. Everything comes down to that.

RACHEL To the famous golden rule?

JESUS I see you know it then.

RACHEL I read it in the gospels.

JESUS No, you read it in your heart "Treat others the way you want them to treat you."

[telephone ringing]

RACHEL How strange! A phone call here in the desert. … Hello?

KÜNG Hello, this is Hans Küng.

RACHEL The famous theologian? How did you find us?

KÜNG I've been listening to all these interviews with great interest. And since today you're talking about ethics, a topic that excites me, I wanted to take part. Did you know, Jesus, that the Chinese sage Confucius, five centuries before you lived, proposed the same golden rule "Don't do to others what you don't desire for yourself"?

JESUS Well, blessed be Confucius!

KÜNG And the Buddha, who also lived five centuries before you, in India, taught the golden rule this way "I will not do to others what they should not do to me."

JESUS Well, blessed be the Buddha too!

KÜNG And the prophet Muhammad, who preached to the Arab peoples six centuries after you, said the same "Desire for others what you desire for yourself."

JESUS Blessed be Muhammad as well!

RACHEL Tell us, Jesus, how do you explain these commandments that are all so similar, despite the distant places and the different times?

JESUS What our friend who just called has said about these men of God proves to me something that I've always believed God did not engrave the commandments on stone tablets, he engraved them on our hearts. Our heart tells us what we must do.

KÜNG Well, Jesus, you should be aware that you're referring to something that's being discussed these days in the United Nations the universal ethics of all humankind, of both believer and non-believers. This ethics has four pillars do not kill, do not rape, do not lie, do not rob.

JESUS Well, blessed be the people who work for that universal ethics, and blessed will be the house built on those foundations. It will remain standing even longer than this mountain.

RACHEL Thanks to theologian Hans Kung, and thanks to you, Jesus. And with Mount Sinai rising behind us, we sign off for now. This is Rachel Perez, special correspondent of Emisoras Unidas, sending you greetings.

MUSIC

ANNOUNCER Another God is Possible. Exclusive interviews with Jesus Christ in his second coming to Earth. A production of María and José Ignacio López Vigil, with the support of the Syd Forum and Christian Aid.

INTERVIEW 78: BACKGROUND MATERIAL

The golden rule

All the major world religions offer a supreme norm or "golden rule" like the one the Jesus taught (Matthew 7,12; Luke 6,31). Rachel reminds Jesus of the "rules" formulated by Confucius, Muhammad, and the Buddha.

The first sage to announce the golden rule of reciprocity was Confucius, who lived in China about 551-489 BCE. He stated: *Do not impose on others what you would not choose for yourself.* And also: *Do not do to others what you do not desire for yourself* (Dialogues 15,23). The development of Chinese writing spread the Confucian golden rule throughout all the vast territories of Asia that were influenced by Chinese culture.

The golden rule also appeared in the religious traditions of India long before the time of Jesus. Hinduism affirms: *We should not behave toward others in a way that is disagreeable. Such is the essence of morality.* In Jainism, a religion that separated from Hinduism six centuries before Jesus lived, the golden rule is expressed thus: *A man should treat all creatures as he would like them to treat him.* Five centuries before Jesus, the Buddha declared in India: *I will not do to anyone else what they should not do to me.* And Buddhism, following his tradition, expressed the rule in these words: *A condition that I do not find pleasant or agreeable for myself would not be so for another person either. How could I impose on another a condition that I do not find pleasant or agreeable?*

In Judaism the Rabbi Hillel, who lived 60 years before Jesus, wrote: *Do not do to others what you do not want them to do to you* (Sabbat 31,a); and also: *You should not do to anybody what is painful for you.* Six centuries after Jesus, Muhammad had his own formulation of the golden rule: *Desire for others what you desire for yourself.* And Islam teaches: *None of you are believers until you desire for your brothers and sisters what you desire for yourself.*

Silver and bronze rules

In a short but meaty text titled "The Rules of the Game", U.S. astrophysicist Carl Sagan offers some insightful and humorous reflections on humanity's moral codes. After reviewing a number of them, he uses a little science to analyze the bases of people's altruistic or selfish attitudes and of their vindictive or cooperative tendencies, along with their respective costs and advantages. He concludes with this interesting schema:

FOUR RULES OF BEHAVIOR

The Golden Rule:
Whatever you want others to do for you, do it for them.

The Silver Rule:

Don't do to others what you don't want them to do to you.

The Bronze Rule:
Do to others what they do to you.

The Iron Rule:
Do to others whatever you want, before they do it to you.

The Give-and-Take Rule
First cooperate with others, and then do to them what they do to you.

Confucius, the Buddha, the Hindu sages, Jesus and Muhammad all chose the Golden Rule.

The ancestral ethics of the peoples of the Andes

In the Inca empire there were three "commandments": *Ama suwa, Ama llulla, Ama khella* (Don't steal, Don't loaf, Don't lie). That same ancestral ethics has survived among this people till the present day: respect others' goods, respect hard work, and respect the truth. With these principles they have developed an ethics of mutual concern.

Chilean educator María Victoria Peralta relates: *Every people has its own cosmovision, its way of seeing the world, its way of understanding the place of humans in the world and the values that give meaning to life. The Aymara peoples told me: "Solidarity is not a value for us." They explained to me that for them the term had a rather paternalistic connotation. "We speak of reciprocity. In our society the great value is reciprocity: we all help one another out." How interesting. It's not that I, better off than you, am going to be in solidarity with you. No, I help you, and you help me. The bond is reciprocal; the relationship is more egalitarian. The concept seems to me to be much richer, and it yields a richer ethics.*

"Another" ten commandments

In his book *The God Delusion*, British scientist Richard Dawkins argues that human beings do not need to believe in God to behave morally, and he observes that the moral *zeitgeist* of humanity (that is, the moral climate, the reserve of moral norms at a given moment) changes in the course of time and is always shifting. For these post-modern times Dawkins offers the following "new ten commandments" that he discovered on an atheist website. The first one is the "golden rule" of all the great religions of antiquity, but the others are less traditional:

1. Don't do to others what you don't want them to do to you.

2. In everything, try not to cause harm.

3. Treat human beings, living things, and the world in general with love, honesty, faithfulness, and respect.

4. Don't ignore wickedness, and don't fear to administer justice, but always be ready to pardon the evil that has been done if it is freely admitted and honestly repented.

5. Live with a spirit of joy and wonder.

6. Seek always to learn something new.

7. Test everything, keep revising your ideas in the face of facts, and be ready to discard even a cherished belief if it is not in accord with your principles.

8. Never try to censure or cut off another's dissent. Always respect the right of others to disagree with you.

9. Develop independent opinions on the basis of your own reason and experience, and don't allow yourself to be blindly led by others.

10. Question everything.

To these ten commandments Dawkins adds still others, from his own collection:

Enjoy your own sexual life (as long as you harm nobody), and let others enjoy their own in private, whatever be their inclinations, which in any case are none of your business.

Don't categorize or oppress others because of their sex, race, or (as far as possible) species.

Don't indoctrinate your children. Teach them how to think for themselves, how to evaluate evidence, and how to disagree with you.

Value the future on a time scale longer than your own.

Three great religious currents, but the same ethics

The past colonial conquests and wars wiped out much of the indigenous religious culture of the Americas and Africa, but in today's world three great religious traditions still remain dominant: the indigenous religions of India: Hinduism and Buddhism; the indigenous religions of China: Confucianism and Taoism; and the indigenous religious of the Near East: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. In the Far Eastern religions the central figure is the sage; in the religions of India it is the mystic; and in the Near Eastern religions the central figure is the prophet. These three great religious currents all coincide in their ethics.

Confucius: a master of Chinese wisdom

China has the oldest and wisest civilization on the planet. Some six centuries before Christ, Chinese civilization entered into a stage of maturation, passing from a stage of magical religiosity to one of rational philosophy. Among the great thinkers of that historical moment was Kong Fuzi (the teacher Kong) known in the west as Confucius (ca. 551-479 BCE). As an itinerant teacher, Confucius

appealed to people's ethical decisions and moral strengths. He proposed "reciprocity" as a norm of conduct, and he always was guided by the ancestral past of the Chinese culture: the ancient sages, the family ties, the forebears of the nation.

Confucianism was the official religion in China until the 7th century after Christ, and it has had a great influence on Korea, Vietnam and Japan. Today it remains one of the deepest roots of the Chinese philosophical tradition, always seeking harmony between heaven and earth.

Buddha: a spiritual guide

Along with Jesus, Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha (the Awakened or Enlightened One), is the spiritual guide with the greatest following in human history. He was born 500 years before Jesus, on the border between India and Nepal. As a youth he sought answers to four questions: what is suffering? where does it come from? how is it overcome? and what is the path to overcome it? What the Buddha discovered was that life consists of suffering, that suffering arises from attachment to things, that attachment can be overcome by renouncing desires, and that this requires one renounce the longing for pleasure and for mortification until one reaches nirvana.

His "interior path" produced a new religion, one that rejected the religion of his time and his culture, the religion of bloody sacrifices of the Vedas and the Brahmans. The Buddha was a teacher, a kind of psychotherapist, who sought to cure people of their attachment to themselves and announced a way of becoming free of egocentricity, in order to open up to universal compassion. The religion he began, Buddhism, is an ethics of life. Buddhism demands that human beings live humanly and that they become humanized through the exercise of altruism, benevolence, solidarity, and a quiet, serene joy.

Muhammad: the founder of Islam, the religion of the book

In the 7th century CE Muhammad founded the religion of Islam, one of the three monotheistic religions, along with Judaism and Christianity. Next to Christianity, Islam has the largest number of adherents in the world, some 1,600,000,000 adherents. The word "Islam" means "free submission to God's will". The faith is based on the Koran, the "uncreated book" which Allah (the name of God in Islam) sent to Muhammad, the prophet who unified the Arab peoples under this faith.

For centuries the Koran was transmitted orally, before being set down in definitive written form. Although the religion was born in the Arab world, today Arabs represent only a fifth of the Muslims that exist in the world. In demographic terms, Indonesia, Pakistan and India are the three nations with the greatest number of Muslims. At the present time Islam is increasing in the western world through migration and conversions. Despite this, Islam is still intimately linked with Arab culture. Two of the three great places of pilgrimage, Mecca and Medina, are found in Arab lands, and the third site, Jerusalem, is in territory that is divided between Arabs and Jews. The Arabic language, since it is the language of divine revelation, is a sacred language. The Koran, when translated into other languages, loses its divine value. For the Muslims, the Word of God did not become man, it became a book.

Muslim temples, called mosques, have no images. They are decorated simply with words of the Koran, which are traced artistically in large letters. There are also other adornments, but nothing that represents the human figure. They use no choir or music or instruments, only the solemn recitation of the texts of the Koran. In the mosques any Muslim may act as an imam, directing the people in prayer. Muslims profess their faith by hearing, memorizing and reciting the Koran, from the time they are born till the day they die.

Jesus: also Buddhist, Sufi, Confucian…

Scholars who have studied the Gnostic gospels claim that the Jesus who appears in them turns out to be more universal than the one presented in the four gospels that were accepted as authentic and wo are found in the Bible. They further claim that the message of the Gnostic Jesus contains much thought similar to that found in Buddhism, Hinduism, Confucianism and Islamic Sufism.

According to Elaine Pagels, a professor who has specialized in the Gnostic gospels, the Jesus found in those texts is a spiritual guide who seeks to open the hearts of those who hear him to spiritual understanding. He speaks of inner illumination, and not, like the Jesus of the canonical gospels, of sin and repentance. She cites, for example, the following fragment from the Gospel of Thomas: *Examine yourself and understand who you are, how you live, and what will become of you. … You should not remain ignorant about yourself, for one who does not know being knows nothing, but one who knows being has already acquired knowledge of the universe's depths.* Pagels points out the similarities between these messages and those of modern transpersonal psychology.

In her best-seller, *Beyond Belief: The Secret Gospel of Thomas* (2003), Pagels contrast this gospel with that of John. She claims that, while John emphasizes that Jesus is the *light of the world*, Thomas teaches that *there is a light within each person, which illuminates the entire universe. If it does not shine, there is darkness.* According to Pagels, Thomas teaches that Jesus is not God, but a teacher who seeks to reveal the divine light that exists in all human beings; she argues that John's gospel was written as a reaction to the message of the Gospel of Thomas.

Morality written on the heart

Besides being a prophet, Jesus was a mystic. This is shown in his vision of God and in the way he related to the law and the world of human relations, giving priority to the latter over the former and over all human hierarchies. The German Benedictine monk Willigis Jäger explains the difference between a morality based on laws and an ethics emerging from mystical experience and born of the heart: *Christian morality is based on a dual conception: God is a being external to the world, and people must keep the commandments of that external God in order to be rewarded and gain future salvation in the hereafter. Mysticism, in contrast, claims that human beings are able to find God in the world, in themselves, and when that happens, they will act morally.*

Hans Küng

Küng is a Catholic theologian from Switzerland, perhaps the most universally recognized thinker in contemporary theology. Bold, prolific and polemical, he was suspended as a professor of theology in 1979 by the Vatican. He participates in our program by virtue of his serious research into world

religions, aimed at building bridges between those religions and thus finding a road toward universal peace.

Küng bases his work on this principle: *There is no peace among nations without peace among religions. There is no peace among religions without dialogue among them. There is no dialogue among religions without universal ethical norms. There is no survival possible in our world without a worldwide ethics, without a universal ethics.*

Hans Küng takes an active part in the Project for a World Ethics, begun in 1990, and since 1995 he has been president of the Foundation for a World Ethics. Among his many works we especially recommend *In Search of Our Tracks: the Spiritual Dimension of the World Religions* (2004), in which he delves deeply into the history, beliefs, rites, and traditions of all the great religions of humankind, presenting them in a way that allows us to find in each of them points of contact, shared values, and common denominators.

Kung states in the introduction: *With this book I invite you to get to know better the world of the great religions, which is as heterogeneous as it is fascinating and mysterious. This book contains what every man and every woman today should know, if they wish to offer a serious analysis of current events. Nowadays, in order to make sound judgments about the world situation, people must be competent not only in matters of economics, culture and society, but also in matters of religion.*

Interview 79
THE WILL OF GOD?

RACHEL But listen to me, we had confirmed reservations…

OFFICIAL Miss, there's no more space on the plane. You'll have to wait for the next flight.

JESUS What's wrong, Rachel?

RACHEL These sons of … Israel have overbooked, and we don't have seats on this flight.

JESUS They've over-what?

RACHEL We'll have to wait for another flight, in the afternoon. Well, as my granny used to say, there's always a reason. Maybe we'd have boarded that flight, and then that plane … God always has his reasons.

JESUS Why do you get God mixed up in this, Rachel?

RACHEL Because… wasn't it you who said that even the hairs on our head are numbered and not one of them falls unless God allows it?

JESUS Yes, I said that.

RACHEL And so? If that's the case with a hair, imagine with an airplane. Hold on a second, the studios are asking me to give to sign on…. Friends of Emisoras Latinas, here we are today, still in the Sinai airport. The airline overbooked the flight and has left us stranded. But the delay will allow us to converse further with Jesus Christ, who is here beside me, and an appropriate topic of conversation would be surrendering to divine providence. What do you think, Jesus?

JESUS What kind of surrender are you talking about, Rachel?

RACHEL The surrender you always recommended, just leaving everything in God's hands.

JESUS "God will provide" – that's what Abraham was saying to his son Isaac.

RACHEL Exactly. Because things happen when they have to happen. For example, I've been interviewing you these past few days. That was a good fortune that fell to me. And what falls to you, nobody takes it away from you, isn't that so?

JESUS It seems to me, Rachel, that your mixing dates with olives.

RACHEL Tell me, why have I been the only reporter to have interviewed you in your second coming?

JESUS Because the others went away, … and because you and I met in Jerusalem. Or are you forgetting that?

RACHEL I remember it well. And I think that God arranged things well. It was … it was the will of God.

JESUS What do you mean, the will of God?

RACHEL That you should cross my path. So that our audience could hear you. … That's what God wanted.

JESUS Don't stick God in where he doesn't belong. God had nothing to do with your being there that day on the esplanade.

RACHEL But you said that even the hairs of …

JESUS … the hairs of our head are numbered. I said that because there are people who suffer anxiety and become despaired, people who don't live fully today for fear of what will happen tomorrow. Each day has troubles enough of its own – I also said that.

RACHEL And that's not the same as leaving everything in God's hands?

JESUS Not at all. That's putting everything in your own hands. What you don't do with your hands God will do for you. God's hands are your hands, Rachel.

RACHEL Well, many of your followers teach us differently. They say "Are things going well for you? or are they going badly? Just resign yourself – it's the will of God." If they win the lottery, they say "Thank you, my God, you gave me the prize." And if they lose their job, they say "I accept it, my God, you took it away from me."

JESUS No doubt they also say that poor people are poor because of the will of God, and the poor will always be with us …

RACHEL Yes, they say that also.

JESUS No, Rachel. That's not the will of God. Anyone who thinks that way is like a little baby who seeks its mother's warmth in order to feel secure. God is our mother, yes, and God never abandons us. But haven't you ever seen how mothers wean their children so that they'll eat other food and grow stronger and walk on their own? Let me tell you the truth the will of God is … that we not believe in the will of God.

RACHEL And so?

JESUS And so, keep fighting with those sons of … Israel. Make a stink with those airline people to see when *their* will will be done so that we can get out of here.

RACHEL I'll get on it right away. But first, I want to wind up our program. … Reporting from the Mount Sinai airport, this is Rachel Perez, for Emisoras Latinas.

MUSIC

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INTERVIEW 79: BACKGROUND MATERIAL

A religious belief

When we think that everything that happens in the world and all that happens to us personally happens just because of the "will of God", then we are living according to a particular conception of history, the world and life, one that may be called "providentialism". This consists in the belief that God is the true protagonist and subject of history and that we human beings are only instruments in his hands.

From the viewpoint of providentialism, God is just, and when evils occur, they are only "tests" that God sends to see if we are really faithful, to find out how long we will persevere, and to discover if we will renege on him. For providentialism human time and history are lacking in value: the true rewards and punishments come outside of time, in eternity. Providentialism considers "the ways of God" to be "inscrutable": human beings cannot understand them and should not even question them.

There are many popular sayings and adages that express the providentialism of traditional religious culture: "What befalls you, nobody can take away from you"; "God will provide"; "A tree that is bent never straights its branches"; etc. Some people moderate such fatalism with common sense, expressed in sayings such as "God helps those who rise early," but there are others who retort with: "Getting up earlier doesn't make the sun rise sooner."

The well-known saying of Jesus, "Each day has troubles enough of its own," is echoed in various eastern philosophies. For example, the Dalai Lama has reportedly said: "There are two days in the year when you can't do anything. One is called yesterday, and the other tomorrow. Therefore, today is the only day in which you can do something, the only one in which you can really live."

One of the most valuable fruits of liberation theology was its questioning of the providentialist aspects of popular religiosity. It made people feel responsible for every day of their own history and helped them to become "agents of their own liberation".

The providentialist Saint Augustine

Providentialism is an essential part of traditional Christianity and is at the root of Latin American religious culture, which did not collectively experience the liberating force of the Protestant

Reformation or the Enlightenment. Augustine, the bishop of Hippo, is considered to be the church's first great providentialist. During his life Augustine witnessed the fall of the powerful Roman empire at the hands of barbarian peoples, and he judged that such a historical disaster could have occurred only by the "will of God". In line with this providentialist interpretation of historical events, Attila, the leader of the Huns who laid siege to Rome and Constantinople, was called by the Christians of that time "the scourge of God", a title that reflects providentialist ideas: more than a skilled warrior, Attila was a "test" sent by God.

History: a linear process directed by God

The providentialist idea prevailed for centuries. During the first years after the Spanish conquest of the Americas, many Catholic authors promoted the idea that the "discovery" of the New World as a territory to be evangelized was a providential act of God: God willed the discovery in order to compensate the Church for the evils caused to European Christendom by the Protestant Reformation.

Providentialism always presents history as a linear process directed by God. History is viewed as leaving an original state and moving toward a goal predetermined beforehand by Divine Providence; it moves from a negative situation, caused by original sin, toward a final salvation, which can be reached only in the "hereafter". For providentialism, nothing that happens is the full responsibility of human willing, which is ruled by the will of God, the God who fashions the destiny of individuals, nations, and the entire world. The doctrine of "predestination", developed by Augustine and defended centuries later by Luther and Calvin, is a still more radical expression of providentialism. All these ideas are, of course, highly detrimental to any appreciation of human freedom.

The breeding ground of resignation

Nicaragua political scientist Andrés Pérez Baltodano has offered extensive critical reflections on providentialism, and also on its political consequences. He finds providentialism responsible for the mood of resignation that characterizes the political cultures of Nicaragua and, to a greater or lesser degree, most other Latin American countries. He designates that culture as one of "resigned pragmatism." Some of his ideas are as follows:

"Resigned pragmatism" is a concept I use to explain our vision of history and of our role in history. "Resigned pragmatism" is a way of thinking or a culture which inclines us to adapt ourselves to reality and accept reality just as it is. The resigned pragmatic way of thinking does not aspire toward transformation. It renders us incapable of being so scandalized by the reality we experience that we wish to change it. … This way of thinking has allowed us to become habituated to the brutal levels of poverty suffered by our fellow citizens, and to the impunity and the corruption of our officials.

But where does resigned pragmatism come from? What is the origin of this culture, this way of conceiving power and history? I believe that one of the principal roots of resigned pragmatism is to be found in the providentialism that has dominated our religious culture. Providentialism is a view of history that would have us believe that God is the force that organizes every movement we make. It is a way of viewing life which makes God responsible for what happens to my uncle, to me, to Nicaragua as a society, to Iraq, and to the rest of the world. In this vision of history shaped by

providentialism, it is God, not us, who is the regulator, the administrator, the auditor of everything that happens in history.

Some theologians distinguish between "meticulous providentialism" and "general providentialism", and they claim that in some societies the meticulous type prevails, while in others it has been transformed into "general providentialism". According to meticulous providentialism, God is in charge of everything: rain and drought, cancer and cancer cures, the direction of every hurricane. Those who defend general providentialism have a somewhat different understanding. Some hold that God created the world and then left us on our own, while others say that God intervenes every once in a while. General providentialism always allows space for human freedom. I personally think that what is necessary is not to remove God from the game, but to surmount the meticulous providentialism that now afflicts us and to seek out the true place of God and the place of our own freedom. And on that road, if anyone should decide to be an atheist, let him be one, but an honest atheist.

How do we know what God's will is?

Providentialism is actively promulgated in the present day by official Catholicism through its communications media, its preaching and its devotions "to Divine Providence". One of the most popular Catholic spokespersons, Mother Angelica, says, for example: *Many people ask the question: How do I know what God's will is for me? The answer is simple: "If it happens, then it is God's will. It doesn't matter whether God ordains it or simply allows it, because nothing happens to us if God has not first foreseen it, taken into account the good that will come of it and given his seal of approval.*

The submission to God's will that results from ideas like these has much to do also with the Church's institutional power. Many of the "spokespersons" of the churches claim that God's will finds its true expression in the words of the priests and pastors who interpret the Bible and Christian traditions. Consequently, obeying God's will ends up being the same as obeying the not exactly disinterested human will of the hierarchies which claim to represent God.

In reality, everything is much simpler – but not necessarily easier, because "fear of freedom" is also a reality. In overcoming this fear we should become responsible for our lives and for history itself. We should grow and mature as adults. When Jesus says to Rachel, *"The will of God is … that we not believe in the will of God,"* he calls to mind the prayer of the German chemist Otto Hahn, who won the Nobel prize in chemistry in 1994. Hahn's prayer goes like this: *May God give me strength not trust blindly, not even in God himself.*

Interview 80
VIOLENCE OR NON-VIOLENCE?

RACHEL We have returned to Jerusalem with just a few days remaining before Holy Week, and we continue with our exclusive interviews with Jesus Christ. Today we want to ask him a question of much urgency these days Jesus, do you approve of violence or condemn it?

JESUS Why do you say it's an urgent question these days?

RACHEL Come over here near this kiosk. Let me just read you the headlines "47 dead in two attacks" – "new U.S. threats in the Middle East" – "tribal wars continue in Central Africa". Jesus, our world is very violent.

JESUS And so is my country. These days I've seen a lot soldiers around here.

RACHEL They're Israeli soldiers, occupying Palestinian territories.

JESUS I also lived in a world of great violence in my time, Rachel.

RACHEL But in the films your world seems to have been so peaceful and idyllic, with lots of birds and flowers.

JESUS No, it wasn't that way at all. When I was born, my country was already occupied by the Roman troops.

RACHEL What did that mean?

JESUS Humiliations, death, and of course taxes. Our country paid extremely high tributes to the Roman emperor. They used to drain us dry.

RACHEL So the concept of imperialism is something familiar to you?

JESUS Very familiar. I saw Roman soldiers in the land from the time I was a kid. They used to enter the villages, they robbed, they raped the women. They despised us and thought they were the masters of everything.

RACHEL Do you remember any especially bloody event?

JESUS I was young, but I remember when the Romans crucified hundreds of rebels in Sepphoris, the capital of Galilee. I went there and saw it with my own eyes. People were always rising up against the Romans.

RACHEL Was it guerrilla warfare, armed violence?

JESUS The Romans had swords and shields. They had horses. How could you fight them without arms? In my homeland, Galilee, a movement called the Zealots arose; they were an armed group.

RACHEL That was the first armed resistance?

JESUS No, before the Zealots there were other groups, inspired by the Maccabees, who had risen up against the Greek empire a hundred years earlier. My mother gave the name Simon to one of my brothers in memory of a great Maccabean leader.

RACHEL And did you… did you get involved in that resistance?

JESUS We all took part, in one way or another, either involved in the fighting or providing cover for those who were. The women took food to the rebels, who used to hide in the caves of Arbel, I remember.

RACHEL And what did you do?

JESUS As a boy, I used to carry messages. We used to inform them about where the Roman troops were moving. As a youth, I supported them at various times. Yes, I did.

RACHEL Was it a nationalist movement?

JESUS It was. We wanted a free country. We wanted the Romans to leave.

RACHEL Were the Zealots a political party?

JESUS They were very well organized. They carried out attacks. They were very brave, but also quite fanatical.

RACHEL And in your group, … did you allow that kind of people in?

JESUS I announced God's Kingdom in Galilee, and the first ones to joined were my paisanos from the north. Some of them were Zealots, or at least had been before. I didn't bother to ask them about that.

RACHEL Let's get back to our starting point do you approve of violence or condemn it?

JESUS I think that there are many forms of violence, Rachel. The occupation of my country by military force was violence. The taxes the Romans collected came from the sweat of our people. That also was violence.

RACHEL In a message sent to us, a listener reminds us that Oscar Romero, who was bishop of San Salvador, one of the real saints, used to distinguish between the institutionalized violence of those who hold power and the "reactive violence" of those who resist. What do you think of that?

JESUS I think that's well said, because you can't use the same yardstick to measure the violence of those on top and the reaction of the people at the bottom. For example, in my day, how could you compare the violence of the Romans with that of the Zealots?

RACHEL And what is your opinion, esteemed audience? What will the president of the United States have to say about these declarations? What will the leaders of the European Union say? Will they bring criminal charges against Jesus Christ, accusing him of being an international terrorist? From Jerusalem, this is Rachel Perez, reporting for Emisoras Latinas.

MUSIC

ANNOUNCER Another God is Possible. Exclusive interviews with Jesus Christ in his second coming to Earth. A production of María and José Ignacio López Vigil, with the support of the Syd Forum and Christian Aid.

INTERVIEW 80: BACKGROUND MATERIAL

A violent world

Jesus was born and grew up in a land that was militarily occupied. In his time, the Roman empire was the greatest power in the known world. Some 70 years before Jesus was born, his country, Palestine, was made into one more of the many colonized provinces that Rome had on the Mediterranean shores. This meant that the country was ruled a by subservient government, its territory was occupied by Roman troops, and its people were subjected to highly exploitative taxation.

In the time of Jesus the Roman troops maintained "peace and order" in Galilee. They did so with the arrogance characteristic of occupying armies, which believe themselves to be the masters of the lives and the properties of the subject population. Such insolent disregard of people led to frequent rape of women, pillaging of farmers' properties and repression of anyone who tried to oppose them.

The spirit of the Maccabees

The Maccabee brothers, who lived about 160 years before Jesus, were the great heroes of the Jewish resistance to the Greek domination of Palestine. They organized a genuine guerrilla war and won important victories against the powerful Greek empire. The Jewish people recalled the Maccabees as symbols of courage, patriotism and freedom.

The death of Herod the Great, after a tyrannical reign that lasted 40 years, was an especially critical moment in a Palestine already dominated by the Roman empire. In Galilee, which was far removed from the bureaucratic law and order that reigned in Jerusalem and Judea, several armed insurrection movements arose. They received tremendous support from the people and nurtured the rurally based Zealot movement, which was a group that had broken away from the Pharissees; it was founded by a man called Judas the Galilean, who found his inspiration in the Maccabean tradition.

Around the years of Jesus' birth, Judas the Galilean organized resistance to the census that had been ordered by Rome. Later, when Jesus was a youth, the same Judas led a great uprising against the Romans. He conquered the city of Sepphoris, which was just six kilometers from Nazareth; at that time it was the capital of Galilee and the main commercial center for textiles in Palestine. A serious confrontation took place there between the Romans and a strong guerrilla group. Quintilius Varus, the Roman legate in Syria, crushed that revolt in cruel and bloody fashion. Sepphoris was reduced to ashes, and hundreds of Zealots were crucified in the city. Herod Antipas rebuilt the city years later.

The blow was a hard one for the Zealot movement, and it took years for them to reorganize. Although these events are not mentioned in the gospels, which fail even to mention the name of the city of Sepphoris, Jesus certainly had firsthand knowledge of all this since Nazareth was so close by.

Zealots: zealous nationalists

The word "zealot" comes from "zeal" and is related to the word "jealous". The Zealots were zealous, truly passionate about the defense of God's honor. They were called "zealots" because they defended the "jealous" God, the God who does not tolerate other gods, such as money, Roman emperors, or unjust laws. The Zealots carried on clandestine activities, and some of them waged guerrilla warfare, especially in Galilee, where Roman control was weaker. They had a program of agrarian reform, demanding that all property be redistributed in a just manner. They also proposed the cancellation of debts, following the model of the Mosaic Jubilee Year, the Year of Grace. They were opposed to any payment of taxes to Rome. The small farmers and other poor people of Israel, worn down by the taxes, were sympathizers of the movement, collaborated with its members and provided them support and cover.

The most radical group within the Zealot movement was that of the "Sicarios", who always carried under their tunics small daggers, called "sicas"; they committed frequent attacks against the Romans. The Zealots and Sicarios used to kidnap important people; they assaulted the haciendas and houses of the rich, and they ransacked the Roman arsenals. They understood their struggle to be an authentic "holy war". The punishment Rome meted out to anyone found guilty of such crimes against the empire was death on the cross.

The Zealots were not bloodthirsty revolutionaries or what we today call "terrorists". Neither can they be identified with a political party, as we understand that term today. Their ideology had deep roots in religious tradition: the Israelites understood their country to be a "holy land" which should not be oppressed by foreigners. The Zealots were characterized by a passionate nationalism and a profound spirituality based on the proclamations of the prophets. Their practice was distinguished by its urgency: they wanted to free Israel immediately from Roman domination. Ideologically they were perhaps the group that most clearly represented the thirst for freedom that the people of Israel experienced in the final centuries of their history.

How many Zealots were there among "the twelve"?

Given all these characteristics, the Zealots must have had great expectations of Jesus, and the crowd appeal of the Nazarene prophet certainly must have attracted their attention. Jesus, as a Galilean, must have been familiar with the Zealot movement and certainly was in agreement with them on many issues.

When Jesus began his own movement with the proclamation, *The Kingdom of God is near!*, he was echoing the hope-filled proclamations which the Zealots were making throughout all of Galilee as a rallying cry against the Roman occupiers. Furthermore, the fact that Jesus' movement first arose and developed in Galilee made it only natural that Zealots would take part in it. Among "the twelve", Judas was certainly a Zealot, and Simon was nicknamed "the Canaanite" or "the Zealot" (Luke 6,15). The nickname that Jesus gave the brothers James and John, dubbing them "Boanerges" (sons of thunder), and the nickname he gave Simon Peter, calling him "Bar Jona", appear to be code names or aliases related to the Zealot movement.

Structural violence, institutionalized violence

Liberation theology proposed the concepts of "structural violence" and "institutionalized violence" to characterize structural sin, by which it means the sin of those societies that allow great inequalities to exist. They are the societies that tolerate injustices committed against the lives of the most vulnerable and where a handful of rich people live comfortably, while the poor masses suffer misery. Structures of violence are those which provoke hunger and landlessness, those which oppress the weakest citizens and leaves them completely defenseless before the powerful. Such violence becomes institutionalized by means of unjust laws, so that it is quite possible for a legal order to be quite violent, one that violates human rights.

In the course of the church's history there have been many reflections about what Thomas Aquinas in the 13th century termed a "just war". This concept is so broad and flexible that it has served to justify truly just armed conflicts, but also a great many barbaric wars.

Archbishop Romero, Saint Romero of America

In our present-day Latin America we have the outstanding example of Oscar Romero, who became archbishop of San Salvador right at the beginning of a civil war in El Salvador that would last twelve years. Romero was always opposed to violence as a method of resolving conflicts, even when these were quite acute, but he on several occasions made attempts, not to justify war or violence, but to differentiate between "institutionalized violence" and "reactive violence". This distinction or dividing line was a constant theme not only in his homilies, but also and especially in his daily activities.

In his homily of June 26th, 1977, he explained himself thus: *Institutionalized violence is that which oppresses by abusing its rights. Violence becomes institutionalized when it seeks to abuse power. In the face of such violence there arose a reaction in Latin America. The bishops assembled in Medellin told us: "A sign of our times is the universal longing for liberation." And the church cannot be deaf to that cry, for it believes that that deep longing of Latin Americans comes from the Holy Spirit, who is inspiring in them awareness of their dignity and making them see the disgraceful condition in which they live. … In response to this situation of violence which has become an institution, liberation movements arise, and there is class struggle, hatred, armed violence.*

Declaring that armed violence “is not Christian either” and rejecting violent methods for resolving the national problems of his time, Archbishop Romero, like Jesus, used “two measuring rods” in his reflections. He spoke strongly against “institutionalized violence” and “repressive violence”. He also condemned the “low-intensity” violence which the United States was already beginning to apply in those days against the people’s organizations in El Salvador. (In his diary he called it: *this new concept of particular war, which consists in ruthlessly eliminating all efforts of the people’s organizations under the pretext of communism or terrorism.*) And he tried to understand the reasons for what he called “revolutionary violence”, considering that it was a response to and a result of “repressive violence”.

Like Jesus, Archbishop Romero was aware that the violence on both sides, as it multiplied, would always develop into an uncontrollable spiral of brutality, harming mainly the people who were poorest and most vulnerable. He was equally aware that repressive violence forced those who found themselves obliged to opt for “revolutionary violence” into a desperate corner. Archbishop Romero tried to “understand” with his heart and his mind, with his words and his actions, the revolutionary option of the poor of his country and the reasons for their “reactive violence”, and that is what cost him his life.

Where war comes from

If we don’t study the matter, we are likely to think that wars are an exclusively human type of behavior, but we forget that they have their roots in animal behavior, especially in that of our nearest biological relatives, the primates. This has been documented in the book *Through a Window*, by the expert primatologist Jane Goodall. She tells the story of a war that took place between different populations of related chimpanzees. Chimps are the species with which we humans shared a common ancestor some six million years back.

Human behavior is full of remnants and traces of the atavistic primate behaviors that produce wars. There are three types of such behavior that we share with primates: the need to establish and defend the territories and borders that separate groups, the sense of property, and the ordering of the group on the basis of rigid hierarchies.

Aggressive forms of behavior aimed at defending territory, property, and hierarchical leadership are at the root of all human disputes, conflicts, and wars, just as they are at the root of wars among primates. For that reason, sharing of possessions, elimination of borders (while respecting and celebrating differences), and suppression of hierarchies are key strategies of humanization. Two thousand years ago, and in a much more violent world, Jesus of Nazareth was already proposing these strategies.

Interview 81
TO CAESAR WHAT IS CAESAR'S?

RACHEL Palestine, 2000 years ago. An occupied country. Violence every day the terror of the Roman troops and the armed resistance of the population. It was a situation similar to what see today in various parts of the planet. To talk about this with us we have our special guest, Jesus Christ.

JESUS Thank you, Rachel, for giving me this opportunity to speak, once again, with so many people that I can't see, but who are listening to us.

RACHEL You were telling us that in your time there was a rural guerrilla movement in Galilee and an urban one in Jerusalem, and that a few Zealot guerrillas belonged to your own group in those days. Is that how it was?

JESUS Yes, there were more than one or two …

RACHEL But you did not opt for armed struggle. Why not?

JESUS The first and most important thing was to open the eyes and the ears of the people, Rachel. An eagle has two claws, and he catches his prey with both of them. My people were the prey of foreign troops, but the Romans weren't the only ones tyrannizing the people. The priests of the Temple also preyed upon them, through fear. Soldiers and priests those were the two claws.

RACHEL Please explain that to us a little better.

JESUS The Romans bled us dry with taxes and terrorized us with their weapons. At the same time the priests were pacifying us with the kind of god they preached. They had established the Kingdom of the Devil. But we were announcing what was opposed to that the Kingdom of God.

RACHEL The priests had that much power?

JESUS They had the Temple, which was a great business it involved the sale of animals for sacrifices, the exchange of foreign coins, trading in the things of God. They also had the Law, which was a heavy yoke on the people fasts, alms, tithes, … And they had fear, Rachel they preached a punishing God who took no heed of sick people, women, or the poor.

RACHEL And the people put up with that?

JESUS The people were blind, deaf, paralyzed….

RACHEL But you confronted that power. Were you a revolutionary?

JESUS I used to say nobody above anybody else, we are all brothers and sisters. And God is the only Lord. Does that make me a revolutionary?

RACHEL And for saying such things the religious powers-that-be persecuted you. Do you consider yourself a dissident, a heretic?

JESUS Sure. Several times they wanted to stone me as a heretic. They threw me out of the synagogue. And the High Priest condemned me to death as a blasphemer.

RACHEL Nevertheless, you were tolerant regarding political power. You were in agreement with the payment of taxes to the Roman emperor.

JESUS What do you mean by that?

RACHEL I'm referring to your famous phrase, the one cited by all the world's politicians "Render to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's" – as if to say taxes for Caesar and praises to God.

JESUS But that's not what I said, Rachel. I said don't give to Caesar what is not Caesar's. That's what I said.

RACHEL It's backwards, then?

JESUS Rather, it's frontwards! Because that man, Caesar, thought he was God. He was arrogant and presumptuous. He had his face engraved on the coins. What I said was don't give him what he asks of you. Put him in his place. He's only a man. And give God what is God's. God is above everybody.

RACHEL So you did *not* approve of the payment of taxes?

JESUS How could I approve of people's paying taxes to a foreign empire? How could they be expected to pay tribute to a man who thought he was God?

RACHEL But why did they turn your words around in the gospels?

JESUS Didn't I tell you that the Romans had us all terrified? It seems that the people who later wrote about the Kingdom of God still had shaky knees in the face of Rome.

RACHEL In that violent world, so similar to our own, what was Jesus Christ's political project? We'll discuss that in our next program, so don't miss it. This is Rachel Perez, Emisoras Latinas, Jerusalem.

MUSIC

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INTERVIEW 81: BACKGROUND MATERIAL

A patriot, not a Zealot

Jesus was not a Zealot. The Zealots were ultra-nationalists. They wanted Israel to be liberated from the Roman yoke, but they did not look beyond the frontiers of their own country. Jesus was a patriot, but his project broke through frontiers and refused to discriminate by race or religion. The Zealots were profoundly religious, but their God was a God that belonged exclusively to Israel, "the chosen people". According to them, when God established his Kingdom, he would take vengeance on the pagan nations. Jesus never spoke of a God who excluded others or who took vengeance.

The Zealots were ardent advocates of strict observance of the Law. Jesus differed from them in this point because of his total liberty in the face of the authorities and the laws, even when these were longstanding Jewish norms. Despite his differences with them, Jesus maintained relations with the Zealots, and some of his disciples were most probably sympathizers or members of the Zealot movement. Many of the social demands of the Zealot movement were shared by Jesus, and the two movements used similar expressions in their ardent desire for the dawning of a reign of justice.

Jesus: violent or non-violent?

Jesus had a basic disagreement with the Zealots in that he did not support violent tactics. Nevertheless, it would be an oversimplification to state that Jesus was a non-violent pacifist or that the gospel condemns all violence, "wherever it may come from". When he was confronting the authorities, especially the religious authorities, and more specifically the priests, Jesus' words were quite violent.

Jesus used violence at certain moments, especially in the action he took in the Temple esplanade a few days before he was killed. However, he did not kill; rather, he was killed. He never urged his disciples to use violence, nor did he use armed resistance to save his own life, when surely he could have done so. And certainly one of his most original messages was that we must love our enemies, which does not mean not having enemies, but being capable of pardoning them, not responding to hate with hate, or to violence with violence.

In the time of Jesus, at that concrete moment in Israel's history, the violence promoted by the Zealots could never have succeeded. It was doomed to failure, and it was a constant pretext for the Romans to unleash their powerful apparatus of repression against the people. This occurred especially in the year 70, when Rome razed Jerusalem as a way of putting down a Zealot insurrection.

Roman taxes: an unbearable burden

The principal function of the Roman governor in Judea – in the time of Jesus, it was Pontius Pilate – was to collect revenues for the empire. He supervised the collection of the taxes that Rome demanded of the province, as it did of all the territories under its control. The governor also had to keep the people at bay, since they periodically became rebellious because of the extortionate practices that the highly abusive Roman system of taxation inevitably involved.

Starting from the days of King Solomon, a thousand years before Jesus, the kingdom of Israel had required taxes of its citizens, although their collection system was not fully developed. The Persians and the Greeks, who occupied the country from 500 to 150 BCE, also established tributary systems. With the Roman domination of Palestine, which became definitive about 6 years before Jesus' birth, a more rigorous form of collecting tributes was imposed on the Israelites. Rome captured all the profits from the country's production through a broad network of customs posts that were established for the collection of a variety of taxes. By means of such posts Rome controlled all commercial movement in the province.

The province of Judea had to make an annual tax payment to Rome of 600 talents, which was the equivalent of six million denarii (a denarius was what a laborer earned for a full day's work). The Romans levied on Palestine three types of taxes: 1) territorial taxes, paid partly in kind and partly in cash; 2) commercial taxes, which were paid on all imported and exported goods; and 3) personal taxes, which varied according to wealth and income, although one general tax, called the *tributum capitis* (tax per head), was paid by everybody except children and the elderly– it's the tax referred to in the gospel.

The high priests, the maximum religious authorities of Israel, made agreements with the Romans in order to maintain their power and, above all, their privileged economic situation. The local government of Judea, called the Sanhedrin, was headed by the high priest, but it had no authority at all with regard to taxation, defense, or relations with other countries. Its only mission was to maintain religious worship and guarantee that religious law was strictly observed.

The "gods" of Rome

During Jesus' lifetime the Roman emperors were Caesar Augustus and then Tiberius Caesar. Augustus, who reigned from the year 30 BCE to 14 CE, initiated the Julio-Claudian imperial dynasty. Tiberius, son of the second wife of Augustus, governed from 14 to 37 CE; it was during his reign that Jesus was executed. After Tiberius other Caesars continued to govern in Rome: Caligula, Claudius, Nero, etc.

Tiberius made Augustus, his adoptive father, into a god. Little by little, the ambition for power drove the Caesars to demand that their subjects worship them personally, as if they were gods. In the time of Jesus the tendency to divinize the Roman emperor was increasing, and afterwards it became firmly established, until the fall of the empire. Caligula had himself worshiped even while he was alive. The Caesars ordered people to prostrate themselves in their presence, and they made images of themselves that were to be venerated by the public. Israel fiercely resisted this custom, which it considered a horrendous form of blasphemy. Although the Jewish religious leaders theoretically did not accept Caesar's divinity, in practice they turned a blind eye and kept quiet about it out of complicity with the established power. The Zealots, because of their nationalism and their religious

faith in Yahweh, their one and only God, were completely opposed to any payment of taxes to the "god of Rome". In this regard Jesus was in complete agreement with them.

A delicate question and a radical answer

One of the most common reasons for mass revolts in Israel was the burdensome taxation. Refusal to pay taxes to Rome was precisely what enkindled the Jewish war in the year 70 CE, during which Jerusalem was leveled down to its foundations and the Jewish people were scattered into the Diaspora. In this context, the question that was posed to Jesus about whether or not taxes should be paid to Rome was especially delicate. The Zealots refused to pay them as an act of resistance to Rome. The collaborationist classes, such as the Sadducees and the priests, recommended that they be paid. The Pharisees wavered: theoretically, they were opposed, since they were very nationalist, but in practice they ended up paying them.

The verse, *Render to Caesar what is due to Caesar, and return to God what is due to God* (Matthew 22,15-22; Mark 12,13-17; Luke 20,20-26), is one of those sayings endlessly repeated by politicians and ecclesiastics of all shades and all leanings. Of all Jesus' declarations, it is the one that has been most manhandled and misinterpreted. This gospel text is frequently employed by political and religious figures to separate faith from politics for two purposes: either to reinforce the idea that religion is just a matter of prayers and devotions and has nothing to do with social and political commitment, or to promote the idea that politics should not be subject to criticism on the basis of ethical or moral principles.

This phrase is often interpreted as evidence that Jesus respected established authority and made a distinction between our commitments to God and our obligations to earthly governments. The is thus assumed that Jesus thought the same way as Paul, who many years later would state that authority should be obeyed because *all authority comes from God* (Romans 13,1-4).

Jesus had to address the question of taxes, since it was a constant topic of discussion in his country and his time, one that seriously affected poor people. However, we have good reason to believe that Jesus' views on this topic, which are condensed into this saying, underwent modification as they were successively passed on in the oral traditions of the first communities, which eventually were put into written form. All such development of tradition happened, of course, during times when the Roman empire and its emperors were all-powerful and much feared. We can hardly believe that Jesus, who must have been repelled by the divinization of Caesar and knew full well the horror of Roman abuses, could have respected Caesar's authority. Rather, on this occasion he took advantage of the delicate question posed to him to offer a radical response: Give Caesar nothing of what he demands, neither reverence nor taxes. Put him in his proper place, the place of an ordinary human being. The place of God belongs to God alone.

A short time later…

What happened later in history is shocking and scandalous. Jesus was roundly opposed to the payment of taxes, which was linked to the cult of the Roman emperor, who thought himself divine. Three centuries later, the popes in Rome, who presented themselves as the representatives of Jesus, adopted all the expressions and the rites of the emperor cult: ceremonial vestments, incense,

candles, throne, crown and scepter. Furthermore, they imposed taxes on their subjects, in the form of tithing. All the Vatican pomp we see today is a reflection of the cultic ceremony that once surrounded the divinization of the Roman emperors. And the collection of tithes, which over the centuries made the Roman church wealthy, also represented an unbearable burden on the poorest people. What would Jesus say? Give Caesar nothing of what he demands, neither reverence nor tithes. Put him in his proper place.

Interview 82
THE PROJECT OF JESUS?

RACHEL We continue our analysis of the political situation in the times of Jesus Christ, and we do so with the help of Jesus Christ himself. Jesus, not a few listeners have called Emisoras Latinas, and they seem extremely concerned, not to say scandalized.

JESUS And why are they scandalized this time, Rachel?

RACHEL Because in the last few interviews you've talked about politics, and according to them you should concentrate on the things of God, especially in these days of Holy Week.

JESUS And what are the things of God for them?

RACHEL Well, I imagine they're referring to prayers, sacraments, worship, … in a word, sacred things.

JESUS I believe that what is most sacred, Rachel, is life itself. God does not cover his eyes when he sees his children hungry. And I couldn't remain calm either when I saw the outrages they were committing in my country.

RACHEL But that's getting involved in politics. You must have earned yourself some enemies when you got involved like that.

JESUS Plenty! The powerful people hated me. But the people at the bottom, the women and those who were down-and-out – they understood.

RACHEL Understood what?

JESUS That the Kingdom of God had arrived! That was the reason they kept joining our movement, every day more of them.

RACHEL Let's get back to your enemies. How is it a man of peace like you had so many enemies?

JESUS Rachel, anyone who struggles for justice will always have enemies. Those who have no enemies are people who aren't doing anything.

RACHEL But you said love your enemies.

JESUS Yes, I said we should love them, not that we shouldn't have them.

RACHEL Is that famous saying about loving one's enemies authentic, or was it also watered down?

JESUS No, that's what I said. And it did not get watered down.

RACHEL What did you mean when you said that?

JESUS Loving your enemies means not falling into the trap of hatred, not imitating their violence. Anyone who struggles against Leviathan can easily end up resembling that monster.

RACHEL You even recommended turning the other cheek. Isn't that a sign of weakness, or cowardice?

JESUS Rather it's a sign of shrewdness. You have to be like the dove, but also like the serpent. There's a time for everything, for throwing stones and for gathering them. With the merchants in the Temple I did not turn any cheek. I drove them out with lashes.

RACHEL But I insist. How is that you, given the extremely critical situation in your homeland and those revolutionary ideas you had, didn't opt for armed struggle in the end?

JESUS The Zealots tried to convince me. They wanted to speed up the coming of the Kingdom with arms. … But violence begets violence. Every insurrection of the Zealots ended in a new bloodbath.

RACHEL And history proved you right. That's exactly what happened a little after your death, in the year 70, when the Zealots rose up in rebellion and the emperor Titus devastated Jerusalem.

JESUS I believed that the Kingdom of God had to come in some other way. As I said, Rachel, the first and most important thing was to open the eyes of the people. In our movement we wanted to unite ourselves together as poor people, to feel our strength, and feel that we were capable.

RACHEL It was a question of organizing? Community organizing?

JESUS Yes, just that community. We wanted to grow from below, like the trees. We wanted to be a people without masters or lords. We wanted a new world, a different world.

RACHEL Did you have in mind a long-term project?

JESUS I was impatient. I wanted God's Kingdom now…. And it didn't come.

RACHEL Many people died, just as you did, struggling for something that never came. Do you consider yourself a failure?

JESUS No, Rachel. Those who fell in the struggle for justice will be raised from the dead by God. In the Book of Life are written the names of all of them. And mine as well.

RACHEL From Jerusalem, for Emisoras Latinas, this is Rachel Perez reporting.

MUSIC

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INTERVIEW 82: BACKGROUND MATERIAL

A project with enemies

It is impossible to work for justice, denounce oppression, and seek equality – all of which are essential to the project of Jesus – without making enemies. Jesus' project is a project of peace and love, but in practice, if peace is based on justice, the struggle for peace will provoke strong resistance and rejection among those who do not live justly.

History demonstrates the complexity of trying to carry out Jesus' project, the risks involved, the high prices that must be paid at times to make it a reality. We should take quite seriously a charge that were made against Jesus in the judicial proceedings that preceded his being condemned to death: *He stirs up the people, teaching throughout Judea, from Galilee even to this place.* That is to say, Jesus made enemies, provoked opposition, created conflicts, and attacked the established order.

Non-violence

Many of Jesus' attitudes and messages fit well with what we nowadays know as the philosophy of active non-violence. This involves the attempt to confront, without violence but quite seriously, the complex conflicts of our world and our surroundings in order to bring about social transformation. This philosophy rejects the idea of violence as something intrinsic to human nature and builds rather on the human capacity for cooperation. It is earnestly committed to educating people and helping them develop habits of dialogue, negotiation and cooperation.

The non-violent posture is not one of passivity or resignation, but involves a permanent attitude of reflection leading to action. It tries to find alternative ways to rectify the inequalities of power that generate conflict, and it hopes that such a way of proceeding will produce more effective and longer-lasting results.

The philosophy of non-violence allows us to perceive the enemy "differently". We learn to distinguish between the true person and the character assumed by that person in the conflict. Loving one's enemy means respecting his dignity, without ceasing to combat his ideas and his actions. Loving one's enemy means recognizing his rights as a person, but contravening his norms. Loving one's enemies is not using the same methods he does, but different ones, methods which allow him to stop being an enemy, to change and be transformed.

Non-violent methods include civil disobedience, work stoppages, hunger strikes, boycotts, public demonstrations, marches, organized denunciations, and countless forms of non-collaboration with those who abuse power and are the enemies of justice and equality. One non-violent method is the crafty posture of "turning the other cheek", while awaiting a more opportune moment to take action. Among the great contemporary figures most identified with non-violent theory and practice are Mahatma Gandhi in India and Martin Luther King in the United States.

The monster Leviathan

Human beings have universally entertained a fear of sea monsters. Even now our great ignorance of the oceanic abysses can help us sympathize with these ancestral fears. In the culture of Jesus' time, people considered the sea monsters to be powerful and frightful; the most famous of them was Leviathan, a marine serpent that appears in several books of the Bible and later on in many commentaries of the Jewish Talmud. The best description of Leviathan is found in the book of Job (40,25-32 and 41,1-26).

Prophet of another Kingdom, of another World

The Jewish scholar Ellis Rivkin insists that the question, "Who killed Jesus?", need to be rephrased to ask: "What killed him?" He argues that Jesus was not crucified for his religious beliefs and teachings, but because of the possible political consequences of his teachings. *It was not the Jewish people who crucified Jesus, but the Roman people. It was the imperial system, a system that victimized the Jews, victimized the Romans and victimized the Spirit of God. It was a system that victimized all men who had no power, and women even more. Jesus proclaimed the* Basileia *of God, the Kingdom of God. That same word was the one used to describe the Roman Empire: the Basileia of Roma.*

The "Kingdom of God", which was the constant "watchword" of Jesus, had religious, political, and social content. To say that the Kingdom of God had arrived, to proclaim that the Kingdom of God was near, was one way of saying, "Another world is possible."

Interview 83
WHO KILLED JESUS?

RACHEL It's Holy Friday in Jerusalem. The Via Dolorosa is flooded with penitents, men carrying crosses, women on their knees praying the rosary, people beating their breasts and evoking the days of passion and death. Especially for you, Jesus, all this must bring back terrible memories.

JESUS Yes, many, but I prefer to forget them. My mother was the one who suffered the most. Magdalene, the women, John, the movement folks,… for everybody it was as if the world was coming to an end.

RACHEL I understand why you wouldn't want to remember the bloody events of that Friday …

JESUS But, Rachel, clear up a doubt for me. I see crosses everywhere I look, in the churches, on altars, and people have crosses in their houses and even hang them around their necks.

RACHEL It's in memory of you.

JESUS What a strange way to remember somebody. Because look, if they stabbed your brother, would you wear a dagger hanging from your neck? The cross is an instrument of torture. Better to forget it.

RACHEL But the cross is sacred. By dying on it you were fulfilling God's will.

JESUS On that cross I was fulfilling the will of the Roman governor Pontius Pilate and the high priest Caiphas and all those opposed to the Kingdom of God.

RACHEL But weren't Pilate and Caiphas instruments in God's hands so that the divine will might be accomplished?

JESUS What are you talking about, Rachel? What kind of divine will was that?

RACHEL That you should die on the cross. That was what God wanted, wasn't it?

JESUS How could God want me to be tortured? Do you realize what you're saying?

RACHEL What was it God wanted, then?

JESUS He wanted me to keep announcing the Kingdom.

RACHEL You mean, you didn't have the mission of dying on the cross?

JESUS How could I have such a mission? The things happened the way they happened. After I drove the merchants out of the Temple, the authorities were looking for us everywhere. We tried to escape toward Galilee, but, as you know, they arrested me in the garden of Gethsemane.

RACHEL In the garden where you resigned yourself to drink the chalice of pain down to the last drop.

JESUS I didn't resign myself to anything, Rachel. I was praying Don't let their will be done, the will of those who want to kill me; rather, let your will be done, Father, your will that I live and preach your Kingdom.

RACHEL In Mel Gibson's movie, "The Passion of the Christ", you appear embracing the cross, desirous of carrying it. You almost seem impatient to have them nail you to it.

JESUS I don't know who that person is you're referring to, but I don't think I'd care to have him as a friend. Who in the world would want to be tortured or nailed to two planks? I tried to escape, to avoid the cross, as I told you, but the situation had already gone too far.

RACHEL So if I understand you well, you didn't want to die?

JESUS Is there anybody who wants to die, Rachel?

RACHEL And God didn't want your death?

JESUS God? God always wants life.

RACHEL What about Judas? It was already written that Judas was going to betray you.

JESUS Nothing was written. What happened here in Jerusalem that Friday was not written down in any book.

RACHEL But you didn't already know how it would end? You didn't know what was going to happen afterwards, on the third day?

JESUS I knew then and I know now that unjust people never have the last laugh, that death never has the last word. God kept faith with me, as you can see here I am, talking with you!

RACHEL Well, … well, dear listeners, we also keep faith with you, and we end our transmission for today. From Jerusalem, Rachel Perez, Emisoras Latinas.

MUSIC

ANNOUNCER Another God is Possible. Exclusive interviews with Jesus Christ in his second coming to Earth. A production of María and José Ignacio López Vigil, with the support of the Syd Forum and Christian Aid.

INTERVIEW 83: BACKGROUND MATERIAL

Lambs, crosses and crucifixes

For centuries the "sacrifice" of Jesus was represented mainly by the image of a lamb immolated "for the redemption of the world." This symbol is still used today, and Jesus is still invoked as the "lamb of God". Such language is a stubborn remnant of the bloody Jewish cults, in which lambs and other animals were sacrificed to please God. These were cults that Jesus rejected. It was not until the 4th century that a cross (an empty one) first appeared engraved in a Christian church in Rome, and only in the 5th century did Christian imagery begin to represent Jesus as the crucified one, on different styles of "crucifixes". In the centuries that followed such images proliferated everywhere. Nowadays they have even become ornaments, even pieces of jewelry displayed on the chests of ecclesiastical authorities.

A theology of abuse?

In a collection of feminist essays titled *Christianity, Patriarch and Abuse*, Joann Carlson Brown and Rebecca Parker offer the following reflection about the theology of suffering and sacrifice: *Christianity is an abusive theology that glorifies suffering. Is it surprising that there is so much abuse in modern society, if the predominant image or theology of the culture is "divine abuse of minors", that is, God the Father, demanding and implementing the suffering and death of his own son?*

Other essays explore the idea that traditional Christian attitudes (guilt, submission, pardon, the value of suffering) are internalized by children, so that they become more accepting of sexual abuse at the hands of adults. This is also the viewpoint of the feminist theologian Rita Nakashima Brock, who claims that all Christological discourse based on the submission of Christ, *obedient unto death* (Philippians 2,8), "sanctions the abuse of minors."

Certainly, there is a historical paradox, on which we should reflect deeply: the death of Jesus on the cross, instead of engendering a culture that prevents unjust violence, ends up promoting the mistaken idea that the cross is the way of perfection.

Telling the story of the Passion with another script…

Almost always the script for the Passion – the events surrounding Jesus' arrest, judgment and death sentence – is taken from "Greek theater": it is a tragedy with the ending already known, since it was "written drown" beforehand as an inescapable, fate-determined destiny. In such a "script", as we know it through theology, sermons, worship, movies, etc., all the characters act out a fixed role: Jesus knows that he has come to die and he accepts it, Judas must betray him and does so, Peter must deny him and does so, the Jews are treacherous, and Mary weeps while accepting her pain. In this

script there are no improvisations, no decisions or circumstances that allow one to think that the events happened the way they did, but that they could have happened differently.

The data provided by the gospels and the many studies that have been done of the cultural, political and social context of that time can help us to craft another script, imagine other possibilities, situate "the Passion" of Jesus within history. Let's try it…

The "hour" to go to Jerusalem

Jesus was well aware that if he went to Jerusalem during the tumultuous Passover feast, he would be running a great risk. He had already provoked too many scandals around Galilee and during his two earlier trips to Jerusalem. People advised him not to go. He could have gone, or he could have decided not to go. If he had not gone, he surely would have spent a few more years preaching in Galilee, and his movement would have grown. But he went. And he invited many other people to go with him. Jesus had plans, and he was eager to make them real. He felt that the "hour" had arrived, not to die, but to take action in Jerusalem by directly denouncing the religious and political authorities that had their headquarters in the capital.

When he arrived in Jerusalem, Jesus was informed about how serious the situation was. The Jewish authorities knew about his arrival, they were waiting for him, and they already knew something about what he had planned. Jesus could have changed his plans. If he had returned to Galilee, his neighbors in Capernaum no doubt would have taunted him and called him a coward, especially after having stirred up so much enthusiasm among the people with that expedition to Jerusalem. Nevertheless, he would have saved his life. Instead, he decided to hide out in Bethany, at the lodge owned by his friends Lazarus, Martha and Mary, where he had already been several times before. Some time before he had sought refuge from his enemies in an isolated spot called Perea.

Palm Sunday: the death sentence

Jesus left Bethany mounted on a burro, acclaimed by the crowd with palm branches. He entered the city through the Golden Gate and went to the immense esplanade of the Temple. What happened on that Sunday has traditionally be presented as a religious procession, but if it had been a procession, it would not have ended as it did, in colossal disorder. And if Jesus had been the "saint" in that procession, he would not have grabbed a whip and flung down the tables of the merchants and money-changers. Given the excited state of the crowd, what happened was actually a massive protest demonstration.

In the course of the tumult, the ones most directly challenged by Jesus were the members of the High Priest's family; they were the owners of the most lucrative businesses carried on in the Temple, the commerce in sacrificial animals and the currency exchange. From the Antonia Fortress, next to the Temple, the Romans saw everything, but they were not overly concerned. These were "matters of the Jews", who inevitably caused disturbances during the celebration of Passover. The Jewish religious authorities, who despised the Galileans from the north country, were concerned, however – quite concerned. Although they might have let pass that provocation, they did not want to take risks. If they underrated Jesus' influence and ignored the disturbance he caused in the Temple, quite possibly similar demonstrations would have taken place in front of the headquarters of other

authorities, and the situation would have become uncontrollable. For that reason, they took drastic measures: within a few hours they ordered read in the streets of Jerusalem a decree condemning Jesus and offering a reward to anyone who would turn him over.

The Zealots' plan

The Zealots were armed groups of Jewish patriots who were opposed to the Roman occupation and chose the path of violence resistance. They were well organized, but divided into different factions. Jesus had been familiar with them in Galilee. In fact, some of the members of his movement were sympathetic to the Zealot cause, Judas among them.

For some time the Zealot leaders had been trying to convince Jesus of the need to take up arms. Jesus must have given thought to that possibility. If at this time Jesus had opted for some type of armed violence, a bloodbath would surely have ensued, given the grossly unequal correlation of power between the Jews and the Romans. Such a bloodbath actually occurred in the year 70, when the Zealots rose up in rebellion and the army of the emperor Tito devastated Jerusalem. Instead of violence Jesus opted for other methods, methods that would reach further and last longer, such as the force of the word, the transformation of consciences, the logic of community, the pressure of the people, the organization of the poor, and efficacious love.

The Zealots knew that Jesus was not one of their own and kept his distance from their kind of radicalism, but the events in the Temple made them accelerate their plans. Although the Zealot strategy always called for violence, they could not help but recognize the great popularity and leadership of Jesus, so they decided to take advantage of the occasion. They knew that if they tried to promote an uprising without the support of Jesus, they would weaken the Zealot movement and reveal their lack of political savvy. They were well aware that none of their own leaders had as much charism as Jesus.

Holy Thursday: Judas's doubts

The great day of the Passover feast was drawing near. Where could the movement folk come together to eat the paschal lamb? If Jesus had remained in Bethany, a place where many Galileans sought lodging, they would have captured him quickly, and the events of the Passion would have taken place 48 hours sooner. Not without a certain rashness, Jesus and his group chose to go to Jerusalem, and they were bold enough to occupy a house nearby Caiphas's palace.

Acting on the part of the Zealots, Barrabas got in touch with Judas and proposed to him a plan: inform the authorities of Jesus' whereabouts so that they could detain him. Since the people's spirits were so enkindled, the arrest of Jesus would spark off an uprising of such proportions that it would make Roman power totter. Judas thought it over. What to do? Events were moving fast, and there was not much time to think things through. Although he was always loyal to Jesus, Judas accepted the proposal of Barrabas, trusting that the rebels would rescue Jesus in time to save his life.

If Judas had rejected this plan, it is very probably that the Zealots, in order to provoke the uprising, would have decided to kill Jesus and then tried to blame the Romans for the crime. And if Judas had delayed his decision, Barrabas most likely would have killed him, fearing that he would reveal the

plan to Jesus' group. Not without anxiety, Judas finally accepted the Zealots' plan. He went to the Temple police and offered to show them how they could arrest Jesus.

The night before returning to Galilee

Some of the movement folks were suspicious of Judas; they found him behaving strangely. If that had not been the case, the authorities probably would have arrested Jesus even before the end of the long, solemn Paschal supper. John was especially suspicious, however, and his suspicions motivated the whole group to leave the upper chamber quickly and seek a hiding place where they thought would be safe. The garden of Gethsemane would allow them to spend the rest of the night without being discovered by Judas, and at daybreak they would escape from Jerusalem and return immediately to Galilee. There they would await a more opportune moment to carry out their campaign against the Jerusalem authorities.

Jesus and his companions hid themselves that night in the garden of Gethsemane. As the hours passed, they all went to sleep. Jesus felt afraid and dedicated himself to prayer. The soldiers sent by the high priest Caiphas arrived sooner than Jesus expected, and they came well armed. Jesus' group had several swords among them. When they saw themselves surrounded, Peter and some of the others tried to prevent the soldiers from capturing Jesus. Jesus could have fled, but he would not have gotten very far. The garden was surrounded, and the gates of Jerusalem were well guarded.

If he tried to flee, the soldiers would surely have massacred all the others in the group. The imbalance of power was obvious. If Jesus had tried to use one of the swords they had there, it would not have helped much: he had no practice in the use of arms, and he would have been the first to be cut down by the guards. What is more, he did not believe in violence. He gave himself up, but it was not really a "spiritual surrender". Rather, he gave himself up to save his companions, so that they could flee. By doing so he was hoping to gain time, trusting that God would help him find a way out of his plight.

Good Friday: the trial of the century begins

The Jewish authorities arranged an impromptu session of the Sanhedrin, the religious tribunal that would pass judgment on Jesus. Meanwhile, Jesus was taken to the house of Annas, head of the richest Jewish family in Jerusalem and father-in-law of the high priest Caiphas. Annas despised Jesus as an ignorant peasant and was confident that he would retract his claims when confronted by authority.

Jesus in no way toned down his language before Annas, despite the man's tremendous power. If he had done so, perhaps he would have been saved from death, if not from torture and imprisonment. And perhaps, after a few years, he would have benefited from an amnesty. But Jesus was on the offensive: he threw in Annas's face all his crimes and corruption, and he threatened him with God's stern wrath. The image people have of a meek and humble Jesus before Annas is false. If he had been that way, Annas would not have flown off the handle, nor would he have struck him and spit in his face, as in fact he did.

Peter followed Jesus as far as Annas's palace, where the interrogation was taking place. In the palace patio some soldiers and a maidservant recognized Peter as one of the leaders of Jesus' group. Peter panicked and denied Jesus, and he did so three times. The cockcrow reminded him of that until the end of his days. But if Peter had admitted belonging to Jesus' band, then that same afternoon they would have erected four crosses on Golgotha, not three.

Once Jesus was arrested, Barrabas and his collaboraters, confident that the people would mobilize in the streets, pursued their plan for a massive rebellion. To begin with, they launched an assault on the armory of the Siloe Tower. If they had been successful, it is quite probable that the situation would have become uncontrollable. In such an eventuality, Jesus might have been freed by the mobs of armed Zealots, but he might also have been killed in the midst of the disturbances by one of the guards. In that case he would have died without judgment and without the way of the cross. But the Zealots failed in their plan, and Barrabas, Dimas, Gestas and other Zealot leaders were captured in a police raid carried out before the assault on Siloe. When Judas heard this, he sunk into despair.

Condemned as a blasphemer

After the appearance of several false witnesses and a series of judicial irregularities, Caiphas, who was presiding over the Supreme Tribunal of Israel, demanded of Jesus that he declare whether he was the Messiah or not. When Jesus answered affirmatively, he sentenced him to death as a blasphemer. If the Jewish priests had executed this sentence, Jesus would have died in a different way. For blasphemers the Jewish Law ordered death by stoning. In such a case, Jesus would not have died on the cross, but on a street corner of Jerusalem, stoned to death by the Sanhedrin members and their allies. The Sanhedrin, however, was afraid of executing themselves the death sentence that they had passed on Jesus. The people, who still supported Jesus, would have risen up against them. A better way of dealing with the situation was getting rid of the condemned man by turning him over to the Roman authorities.

Backed by the people

By dawn on Friday Jerusalem was flooded with Roman soldiers, deployed in the streets to prevent any outbreak of resistance. In the early morning hours the residents of Jerusalem and the pilgrims who had come for the feast gradually learned about what had happened to Jesus. A certain tradition would have it that the people, by reason of their natural inconstancy, abandoned Jesus and that those who had applauded Jesus on Palm Sunday ended up betraying him on Good Friday and even demanded that he be crucified. If this were truly the case, then the most basic principles of social psychology should be judged groundless. What happened was quite the contrary. The people came out into the streets, the inhabitants and the pilgrims demanded that Jesus be freed, and they boldly defied the Roman troops. And certainly there were some who went to the Temple to pray for Jesus' life to be spared. There they discovered that Judas in despair had returned to give back the coins with which he had pretended to "hand over" his friend.

Closely guarded, Jesus was taken to the Antonia Fortress, where Pontius Pilate was awaiting him. By transferring the case to Pilate, the religious authorities were seeking to have Jesus sentenced to death without bloodying their own hands and earning the hostility of the people. Although as Roman procurator he held maximum power, Pilate still perceived that the situation was quite delicate. If he

were to let Jesus go, the resulting ill-will on the part of Caiphas and the Sanhedrin would have seriously damaged his political career. On the other hand, if he were to sentence him to death, he would be going against his own wife, Claudia Procula, who considered Jesus to be sent by the gods and believed that killing him would bring misfortune upon them. What Pilate did finally was "have nothing to do" with Jesus. That was what his wife had recommended.

Pilate's fears

Herod was a corrupt and highly superstitious man. Pilate sent Jesus to him so that he would take responsibility for the death sentence. But Herod did not want in any way to become mixed up in this affair. He just wanted to play with Jesus; he asked him to perform a miracle. Jesus, who had boldly confronted Annas, kept silence before Herod. He had never pardoned Herod for the murder of John the Baptist. He did speak to him, or even look at him. If Jesus had thrown in his face his countless crimes, perhaps Herod would have become enraged and thrown him into one of his many dungeons. Eventually Jesus might have had the same fate as John the Baptist, whom Herod had beheaded. On the other hand, if Jesus had performed some "miracle" for Herod, maybe the king would have contracted him as the court magician. And that way he might have escaped death.

Pilate began to suspect that behind Jesus some anti-Roman conspiracy was brewing. The religious declarations of this prophet mattered little to the procurator. Still, his post was in danger if he did not resolve this case quickly in favor of Rome's interests. If Pilate had issued the death sentence immediately, he would not have been able to discover all the threads of the supposed conspiracy. The best way he could win favor with Rome was not by killing a man, but by uncovering the treasonous plot. For that reason he decided to investigate further by interrogating the accused man. Every repressive system investigates by torturing the people it detains. Pilate did so according to Roman custom, with 39 whip lashes, a torture which few people survive. The soldiers added another torture: they crowned Jesus with thorns, calling him a king and humiliating him with scorn.

He descended into the hell of torture

Pilate ordered that Jesus be tortured in the dungeons of the Antonia Fortress. There was no way out for Jesus. He had "descended into hell." The only way he could possibly get a reprieve was by informing on his comrades, but he refused to do so. He did not open his mouth during the tortures. He uttered not a single name, he gave no information. Jesus' silence was motivated, not by a desire to give an example of humility, but by his solidarity with the members of his movement. If Jesus had informed on them, if he had given the authorities the names of Peter, James, John and the others, maybe he would have saved his own life, but his friends would have been captured, tortured and most certainly crucified.

After several hours when nobody knew what was happening with Jesus, whether he was dead or alive, Pilate exhibited the accused man on the Pavement of the Antonia Fortress. The crowd assembled menacingly in front of this courtyard and with shouts pressured the governor to free Jesus. Pilate was afraid of losing control of the situation. He therefore decided to calm the crowd down by freeing Barrabas, who had less following among the people.

With this semblance of magnanimity Pilate was hoping to confuse the people. If he had ceded to the crowd's pressure and freed Jesus, he would not have been able to escape the machinations of the high priest and the Sanhedrin, who were capable of causing him problems with Rome. And if he had sentenced Jesus to death at that moment, with the crowd present, he would have risked a massive riot, and that was what he feared most.

The pain of Judas

By noon on that Friday everybody in Jerusalem had seen Jesus on the Pavement of the Antonia Fortress, totally destroyed by the tortures. Judas had seen him also. Everybody knew that the freeing of Barrabas would not change Jesus' fate at all. Judas also knew.

What could the Iscariot have done? He had several options. If, in a fit of desperation he had tried to kill the Zealot leaders in retaliation for having involved him in the capture of Jesus, he would surely have been killed himself. And perhaps we would never have been able to know what really happened in those days in Jerusalem.

If he had decided to ask Peter and the others to forgive him, it is probable that his companions, after a first wave of indignation, would have ended up understanding his position. Judas would have lived many more years, and his reputation would not be as dark as the one that now accompanies his memory. However, Judas could not bear seeing Jesus in that condition, feeling himself to be the one who was ultimately responsible. He lost all hope and committed suicide. But he did so not as a renegade full of hatred, as he is often portrayed; rather, he chose death as the only way out, the only way left to him because of his pain and his respect for Jesus. Jesus died that same afternoon.

Interview 84
JUDAS THE BETRAYER?

RACHEL Do we have the link with the National Geographic people? … Keep them on the line…. Friends of Emisoras Latinas, we make contact with you again from Jerusalem on this Good Friday. … Excuse me, Jesus, today we're going to talk with some people from a very serious magazine who have made a surprising discovery. Do you want to take the call?

JESUS Yes, Rachel, but what's it about?

RACHEL Wait, just listen to them…

NATIONAL Perhaps, Jesus, since you have been away for almost two thousand years, you are not informed about the latest biblical discoveries. We are referring to the gospel of Judas.

JESUS Which Judas is that, my friend Judas?

NATIONAL Exactly. In this gospel Judas appears as your great friend.

JESUS He really was my friend. He was a great companion.

RACHEL He may have been your friend, but he betrayed you …

JESUS I prefer to think that Judas got confused and …

NATIONAL What we realize now is that Judas did you a great favor.

JESUS A great favor? What favor? I don't understand.

NATIONAL According to the gospel of Judas, you asked him as your friend to free you from your body. Since you believed that the body was the prison of the soul, then by dying on the cross your divine soul would be free to ascend to God.

JESUS Judas the Zealot wrote something like that?

RACHEL Certainly it wasn't Judas himself, because he committed suicide on Good Friday, but he must have told somebody before he died…

JESUS But what kind of nonsense are you people talking about?

NATIONAL Let's take it step by step, Jesus. What did you ask Jesus to do?

JESUS Nothing. Or rather, the same as I asked of everybody else in the movement to keep themselves united together.

NATIONAL But you needed Jesus to hand you over … Remember the last supper, the kiss in the Garden of Olives … Everything was planned out.

JESUS Planned by whom?

NATIONAL By you, of course. By God. And Judas was an instrument to accomplish those divine plans. That is what is revealed in the text that we found in a cave in Egypt.

JESUS You people didn't know my friend Judas, and whoever wrote that stuff in the cave didn't know him either.

NATIONAL Who was Judas then?

JESUS He was a revolutionary, a Zealot. The Zealots fought to get the Romans out of our country.

RACHEL Zealot or not, he sold you out for thirty pieces of silver.

JESUS Listen, Rachel, and you also, from the magazine. The Zealots were very impatient. Judas took a false step. Maybe he thought that if I was arrested the people would rise up in rebellion and the day of liberation would arrive.

RACHEL But it didn't arrive…

JESUS No, the Romans arrived. Yes, there were protests, but the Romans suppressed them.

NATIONAL So according to you, Jesus Christ, the gospel of Judas is false?

JESUS What seem to me even more false is that idea that the body is a prison. The body is the temple of God.

RACHEL Many thanks, colleagues from National Geographic. In any case, Jesus, you were distressed by what Judas did …

JESUS Judas was the one who was most distressed. When he saw that his plan had failed, he despaired and …

RACHEL He hanged himself and went to hell.

JESUS But why do you send him to hell, Rachel?

RACHEL Okay, not there, because in an earlier interview you said that there is no hell, but … but he was damned, I don't know where, but he was damned.

JESUS Why do you say that?

RACHEL Because people who commit suicide, they taught us, commit the worst sin of all. Since it is the final conscious act they do, they die in that sin and are automatically damned.

JESUS Those who teach such things do not know the heart of God. Neither do they know anything about despair. Who can judge what was in the heart of my friend Judas that Friday when he took his own life?

RACHEL From what we're hearing, the case of Judas still leaves much room for discussion… Was he friend, betrayer, evangelist? What should we call him?

JESUS Call him Judas, the man from Iscariot, the town where he grew up. Judas, that was his name. And I can assure you, his name is also written in the Book of Life.

RACHEL A short break and we'll be right back. This is Rachel Perez, reporting for Emisoras Latinas in Jerusalem.

MUSIC

ANNOUNCER Another God is Possible. Exclusive interviews with Jesus Christ in his second coming to Earth. A production of María and José Ignacio López Vigil, with the support of the Syd Forum and Christian Aid.

INTERVIEW 84: BACKGROUND MATERIAL

A text lost and then found

In his work "Adversus haereses" [Against heretics], written around the year 180, Irenaeus of Lyon mentions the existence of the Gospel of Judas when he speaks of the Cainites, a Gnostic group that used it as a reference. Irenaeus rejected the text, which praised Judas, because by then the former apostle was already considered to be someone accursed. Irenaeus writes: *And they say that Judas the betrayer knew these things and that, simply because he knew the truth before the others, he consummated the mystery of the betrayal, by which, they further say, all things, heavenly and earthly, were dissolved. And they cite a fiction of that sort, calling it the Gospel of Judas.*

This Gnostic gospel was thought to be lost, but by chance it was found in a cave in Egypt in the 1970s. It is one more of the many Gnostic texts dating from the second century, similar to most of the "apocryphal gospels" found at Nag Hammadi in 1945.

The text that was found has some 250 lines about the width of a folio; it appears in a codex of 66 pages, more than a third of them illegible; and it contains three other Gnostic works: the First Apocalypse of James; the Epistle to Philip, attributed to Saint Peter; and a fragment provisionally titled the Book of Alogenes. The Gospel of Judas is written in Coptic, supposedly translated from a Greek original. Various scientific methods, include carbon-14 dating, showed that the codex had been copied between the years 220 and 340. After its recent discovery the document was passed

from hand to hand and went from museum to museum, until the National Geographic Society had it restored and translated and made its contents public in the year 2006.

How Judas appears in "his" gospel

In contrast to the negative idea of Judas, which was quickly propagated in the early church, this text puts a positive evaluation on him. Judas appears as Jesus' favorite disciple and therefore as the one to whom Jesus confided his secret plans. According to this gospel, Jesus asked Judas to hand him over to his death. According to its introduction, the text contains the revelations that Jesus made to Judas in a private conversation three days before the Passover.

Written in the third person, the gospel is a dialogue between Jesus and his disciples, especially Judas, of whom Jesus had prophesied: *You will be the thirteenth, and you will be accursed for generations, and you will come to reign over them.* Jesus is grateful to Judas and praises him: *You will surpass them all, because you will sacrifice the man who covers me.* At the end of the account, a little after entering a luminous cloud, Judas receive "some money." Jesus thanks him for what he has done: now that he is free of his body, he will be able *to return to the great, unlimited kingdom whose immensity no generation of angels has ever seen.*

Although this text rejects the negative image of Judas, it does not reject a fatalistic view of Jesus' death, but rather reinforces it. Jesus wants to die; he desires to be free of his body, of "the man who covers" him; and he himself draws up the plan with his friend, whom he asks to carry it out.

Contempt for the body

The Gospel of Judas is one of the many Gnostic texts that circulated for centuries among the early Christian communities, especially in the church of Alexandria. The core experience of "gnosis" consisted of sentiments of solitude and existential exile, "knowledge" of the origins of evil in the world, and longings to overcome it by spiritual means. Some scholars claim that such views affected many Christian communities, who were disillusioned at the delay in long-expected the end of the world, and their frustration produced a determined, rigid posture of "resisting to the very end."

All these sentiments favored the birth of various forms of monastic life, in which contempt for the body and renunciation of conjugal love found fertile ground. According to this Gnostic gospel, Jesus' contempt for his own body, as a "prison of the soul", is what motivated his scheming with Judas to bring about his death.

Judas, condemned and damned

Traditional doctrine has always contrasted Peter, who betrayed Jesus by denying he knew him and later repented, with Judas, who betrayed Jesus by handing him over and then despaired completely. Such a tradition, while it condemns Judas, manages to rescue Peter, and of course in rescuing Peter it also rescues the primacy of the Roman Pope, who was portrayed as Peter's successor.

Judas in contrast is the reprobate, the accursed, the unsavable sinner. Saint Augustine speaks of him in this way: *By hanging himself he made his criminal betrayal worse instead of expiating it, because by despairing of God's mercy he closed off every possibility of a saving repentance.*

The "perversity" that has traditionally been attributed to Judas has also contributed to the anti-Semitism that has prevailed in official Christianity. The name of Judas is etymologically linked with "Jew" ("Yehudi", "Ioudaios"), so that Judas was linked to the Jewish people by antonomasia. Saint Augustine held that just as Peter represented the Church, Judas represented the Jews, who were enemies of the Church. This idea was exploited in literature and art, which always stressed Judas's greed and portrayed him with exaggerated Semitic features. In this way the stereotype of the avaricious, usurious Jew was promoted.

The rock opera *Jesus Christ Superstar*, written by Tim Rice and Andrew Lloyd Weber (1970) and brought to the screen by Norman Jewison (1975), tries to restore Judas's integrity. It contradicts the traditional stereotype and shows him to have great affection for Jesus (for example, he sings, "I don't know how to love him"); he is therefore torn by doubts about what he should do. However, the film falls into a racist stereotype by having Judas played by the only black actor. Recently a B-movie called "Judas", directed by Charles Robert Corner (2005), creates a more credible biography of Judas. The film ends with a scene in which Peter and the others in the movement bury Judas as a companion, without condemning him; they pray an Our Father for him, showing the compassion they learned from Jesus. A novel interpretation.

"It would be better for him if he had never been born"

Judas has been so often portrayed as the most evil of all evil people that a certain Christian tradition claims that, if there is anybody that can be said to be certainly in hell, then it is Judas. This tradition bases its claim on Jesus' saying at the last supper: *It would be better for him if he had never been born* (Matthew 26,24). However, while this phrase may have been attributed to Jesus by the gospel writer, it was not actually spoken by him. It was something added to the gospel as a dramatic warning to the first Christian communities against betraying their companions. Matthew and Mark put the saying in the mouth of Jesus to give it more authority, and they relate it to Judas to give it a historical setting.

The years in which the gospels took on their definitive form were for the Christians times of underground existence. They were persecuted by Roman power in all the provinces of the empire. Some Christians were at times betrayed by others, but even short of that, any carelessness could lead to death for members of the community. The saying that the evangelists put on Jesus' lips should not be read as a sentence of condemnation of Judas to "hell", but as a norm for the whole church: it would be better not to be "born" in the Christian community if in the end you betray the brethren; it would be better not to enter the community if you are going to cause harm to others.

Interview 85
THE JEWS KILLED CHRIST?

RACHEL Emisoras Latinas is back with you again. We have just now finished our visit to the impressive Holocaust Museum in Jerusalem. Accompanying us was Jesus Christ, our special guest.

JESUS So much suffering, Rachel, so much death … I just can't understand what we saw inside there…

RACHEL It's a very long story that … that begins with you.

JESUS With me?

RACHEL Let's just say, Jesus, that your fellow Jews have been persecuted and killed because they were the ones who killed you…

JESUS I still don't understand, Rachel…

RACHEL You already explained to us that God did not want you to die, but the fact is that they killed you. The Jews killed you. Isn't that so?

JESUS No, Rachel, the ones responsible for my death were the Romans. Pontius Pilate was the one who passed the sentence.

RACHEL But the Romans were spurred on by the Jews …

JESUS Pilate didn't need to be spurred. He was a cold-blooded man.

RACHEL But they say that he was doubtful, that he didn't want to have you killed, but the Jews pressured him, until he washed his hands of it …

JESUS Caiphas, the high priest, and his father-in-law Annas wanted to eliminate me, that's for sure, but the one responsible was Pontius Pilate.

RACHEL No, I'm referring to the people, the crowds, the same ones that shouted your praises on Palm Sunday and then betrayed you on Good Friday. At the crucial moment they abandoned you. Your own people, the Jewish people, were the ones who asked for your death. "Crucify him! Let his blood be upon our heads."

JESUS Where did you get that idea, Rachel?

RACHEL From your biography, from the gospels.

JESUS No, it wasn't that way at all. When the people found out that they'd arrested me, many of them took to the streets, demanding that I be released. I saw them, I heard them.

RACHEL Are you forgetting about Barrabas?

JESUS How can I forget him? He was the famous Zealot leader.

RACHEL And didn't the Jewish people ask to have Barrabas released and then cry out for you to be crucified?

JESUS Do you really think that Caiphas didn't recruit a gang of people and pay them to cry out on Barrabas's behalf?

RACHEL Well, I guess I don't understand anything then. Since we were kids they told us that the Jews killed Christ. Wait, we have a call … Hello?

ISRAEL This is Israel Finkelstein calling. I'm an archeologist and historian. I'm a Jew, and I am listening to this Jew named Jesus saying something that is totally true it was not the Jewish people who killed Jesus, but their religious authorities. But many years later the Roman authorities spread through the world the calumny that it was the Jews who killed Christ. Since by that time the Roman emperors had "converted" to Christianity, shifting the blame was a way for them to wash their hands of the crime, just as Pilate had done.

RACHEL And how is it that such a lie has lasted so long, right up to the present day?

ISRAEL This seed was tended and watered by the authorities of the Christian church, who received tremendous benefits and wealth from the Roman empire. For more than a thousand years they preached and taught that lie. They sowed hatred of the Jews. Your own people, Jesus, has suffered all types of assaults because of this calumny. Always they have been made to migrate, reduced to ghettos, persecuted, and as you no doubt saw in that museum, slaughtered by the millions in gas chambers, killed just for being Jews.

RACHEL Certainly there must have been other reasons for all those horrors..

ISRAEL Ideology always thinks up economic and political reasons.

JESUS But tell me something, friend. Here in my land, in these days, I have seen that my people take an eye for an eye. Before it was they who suffered, but now they make others suffer.

ISRAEL I'm glad to hear you as a Jew say that, Jesus. Yes, our fellow Jews humiliate the Palestinians. The Jewish people despise the Arab peoples. The Jews are not responsible for your death, but they have killed, and still kill, many others because they arrogantly believe themselves to be a superior people.

JESUS It's the same arrogance that I saw in my days …

RACHEL Many thanks to our archeologist friend Finkelstein.

JESUS Come on, Rachel, let's go in there again.

RACHEL You want to go back to the museum?

JESUS Yes, now I understand. And I want to pray before my dead paisanos, so that my people learn that there is no chosen race, that all peoples are equal before God.

RACHEL From the Holocaust Museum in Jerusalem, this is Rachel Perez for Emisoras Latinas.

MUSIC

ANNOUNCER Another God is Possible. Exclusive interviews with Jesus Christ in his second coming to Earth. A production of María and José Ignacio López Vigil, with the support of the Syd Forum and Christian Aid.

INTERVIEW 85: BACKGROUND MATERIAL

The Romans: imperialist, wicked, and cruel

Pontius Pilate was the one person most responsible for Jesus' death. Without his approval the death sentence of the Sanhedrin would have had not validity. History bears this out, and it has become part of the formula of the Christian creed: *He suffered under Pontius Pilate.* The sung Credo in the Misa Campesina Nicaragüense also proclaims it: *The Roman, imperialist, wicked, and cruel, who by washing his hands sought to erase his error …*

Pilate was the Roman governor of Judea during the years 26 to 36. Appointed to rule the provinces of the empire, the governors could hold the post of senator, with the title of legate, or they could be non-senators, with the title of prefect or procurator. This latter was Pilate's case. Within his province the governor could arrest, torture and execute anyone according to the Roman laws, although he could not act the same way with Roman citizens.

Historical evidence does not corroborate the image sometimes given of Pilate: an intellectual with a certain humane stature, even if cowardly. All the information given by both Jewish and Roman historians of that time – Philo, Flavius Josephus and Tacitus – confirm that he was a cruel man, hated by the Israelites for his continual provocations. He was placed in the high post he held because of his close friendship with Sejanus, a military officer who had the favor of the emperor Tiberius and was one of the most influential persons in Rome during those years.

Knowing how opposed the Jews were to images for religious reasons, Pilate had images of Caesar Tiberius paraded through the streets of Jerusalem, and he set them up in the old palace of Herod the Great. The protests of the people were so great that they had to be removed. Pilate also profaned

the sanctuary several times and robbed money from the Temple treasury for his construction projects. Since Galilee was the principal focus of the anti-Roman movements in the country, Pilate was more ruthless in his persecution of the Galileans, who were always suspect of being Zealots.

Barrabas: a Zealot

Along with the Roman governor, the ones most responsible for Jesus' death were the religious authorities of Jerusalem. During the trial in which Jesus was sentenced to death, it was not the people who suggested or asked for the release of Barrabas. The gospels make it clear that the ones who asked for the release of Barabbas were the priests and their hangers-on (Mark 15,11; John 19,6). Barrabas was a Zealot leader whom the authorities had arrested because of his participation in violent uprisings which resulted in Roman soldiers being wounded or killed.

The origins of the prejudice

The belief that it was the Jewish people as a whole who killed Jesus, not the Roman authorities and the Jewish religious leaders, is an ancient, deep-rooted prejudice.

At the beginning of the Christian era, there were thought to be about eight million Jews in the world, living not only in Judea and Galilee, but also in Alexandria, Cyrene (northern Africa), Mesopotamia, Antioch, Ephesus and Rome. This Jewish population, dispersed in a mainly Hellenistic culture, was already experiencing in some places anti-Jewish attitudes because of their commercial astuteness, their different religious beliefs, and their political attitudes. Even so, they succeeded in holding important public posts in some of those cities.

There are traces of anti-Semitism in Paul (1 Thessalonians 2,14-16), who, even though he was a Jew himself, had a strong Hellenistic formation and dedicated his life to announcing Christianity to non-Jewish peoples. There are also gospels texts which can be used to foster anti-Semitism. According to the Jewish historian Daniel Goldhagen, there are 40 anti-Semitic passages in Mark, 80 in Matthew, 130 in John, and 140 in the Acts of the Apostles.

It is important to realize that scarcely 40 years after Jesus' death – and the gospels were written even later than that – Jerusalem and the Temple were destroyed by Roman troops, and the Jewish people became even more dispersed into the "diaspora". From that time on the Jews closely embraced their scriptures as a sign of national identity. Given their uprooted situation, they viewed the emerging Christian communities as dissidents that might divide the Jewish people and disperse them even further. An anti-Christian prejudice was consequently engendered also among the Jewish people. The unfortunate separation of Jews and Christians kept growing, and since that time anti-Semitism has been persistent as a religious, social, cultural and political prejudice. Once Christianity became the official religion of the empire, a form of "ecclesiastical, Christian anti-Semitism" developed and joined forces with the anti-Jewish feelings that already existed in the pagan world.

A Jewish movement

Jesus never conceived of anything resembling the Christianity that we know today. He was a Jew who, within his culture and religion, led a movement for change, transformation, and renovation. After

his death that movement was concentrated in Galilee and in Jerusalem. The Jerusalem community was led by James, a brother of Jesus, whom the high priest Ananias had killed in the year 62. Several years later, in 70, the Temple was destroyed, Jerusalem was razed, and the Jewish Diaspora began.

Even before this catastrophe occurred, Christians had spread through practically all of the Roman empire, in large part because of Paul's tenacious organizing. However, most of those first Christians were actually Jewish Christians, followers of the Jewish Jesus. They viewed him as a man who had striven mightily to renew Judaism with a new vision of God and with a call to religious practice based not on laws or rites or hierarchies, but on justice and compassion in human relations.

The process of separation and growing antipathy between Judaism and Christianity accelerated with the death of James, the destruction of Jerusalem, and the reign of the emperor Nero, who judged the Jewish Christians in Rome to be enemies and persecuted them fiercely. Meanwhile, Christianity fell ever more under the influence of Greco-Roman culture and finally became the official religion of the empire.

One single fact expresses this evolution well: the first followers of Jesus were basically Jews who spoke Aramaic, the language Jesus himself spoke. Just three centuries later, at the Council of Nicea, when the Christian Church was officially established, with its headquarters in Rome, the leaders of that Church spoke only Greek, and a smattering of Latin.

An antagonism that would have broken the heart of the Jewish Jesus

According to the British journalist Lesley Hazleton, a Jewish Christian, if there was one cause of the definitive separation of Christianity from Judaism, it was the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in the year 70. She describes that moment thus: *The greater part of the Sadducee priestly elite was massacred, leaving the way free for the Pharisee movement. During the next 200 years, first on the Mediterranean coast and then in Galilee, their descendents laid the foundation of the rabbinical Judaism which we know today. Without a material temple or any hope of possibly reconstructing one, the first rabbis rationalized the conception of the temple, creating in its place a vast philosophical structure of legal and ethical norms: the Mishnah, and later the Talmud.*

The Palestinians who followed Jesus' teachings and saw in him a prophet of Jewish renewal were dispersed during the chaos that ensued after the destruction of the Temple, but by that time the extraordinary organizing genius of Paul had created a non-Jewish movement which was growing rapidly in all the rest of the Mediterranean basin. This movement, which quickly gave evidence of being solidly grounded, soon began to eclipse Jewish Christianity. The Palestinian prophet was converted into the Christ, a divine being with a Hellenistic aura, and his Jewish character was deemphasized. Furthermore, despite the fact that Paul himself was a Pharisee, the authors of the gospels gravely misrepresented the role and character of the Pharisees, since they wished to avoid incurring the antagonism of the authorities by blaming Rome for what had happened to Jesus. Instead of the Romans, the Jews were portrayed as the real adversaries.

The New Testament faith began to define itself over against the Old Testament. The Jews were seen as different from the Christians, and the Christians lost their Jewish roots. Instead of religious

renewal there was separation, instead of continuity there was rupture. No doubt all this would have broken the heart of Maryam, and even more the heart of her son Jesus.

"The Jews": a mistaken concept

According to the European association called Jewish-Christian Friendship, created after the Second World War and the horrors of the Holocaust, the frequent use of the term "the Jews" in the gospel of John (found there 71 times, many more than the other three gospels) has contributed to Christian anti-Semitism. John's gospel was written when the tensions between the first Christian communities and the Jewish communities were about to provoke a definitive break.

A commission of Jewish, Catholic and Protestant theologians confirm this opinion, stating that the use of the term "the Jews" causes, at the very least, confusion. Sometimes the term is used to refer to the religious authorities of the people of Israel, other times it refers to the people as a whole, and still other times to the inhabitants of the region of Judea, as opposed to the Galileans of the north. The commission has proposed that other translations be used, at least in the Christian liturgical texts of Holy Week. For example, the literal text, *It is not long since the Jews were wanting to stone you* (John 11,8), could be rephrased, *It is not long since the people of Judea were wanting to stone you.* The founders of Jewish-Christian Friendship are committed to *avoiding the use of the word "Jews" when it indicates enemies of Jesus or indiscriminately designates the whole Jewish people.*

The "perfidious Jews"

The history of anti-Semitism in the Catholic Church is long and persistent. In 1555 Pope Paul IV promulgated his bull "Cum nimis absurdum", in which he states that the Jews, who *through their own fault have been condemned by God to eternal enslavement … dare not only to live among us, but also near our churches, without anything about their clothing to distinguish them.* This Pope viewed such behavior as "insolence" and ordered a series of norms against the Jews: they were to be confined to ghettos; forced to sell their properties to Christians at ridiculous prices; prohibited from holding almost all posts and from engaging in most profession, starting with medicine; forbidden to play, eat or converse with Christians; and obliged to wear something distinctive on their clothing.

For centuries, in one papal bull after another, the Catholic Church instilled in the collective conscience of Christendom a spirit of discrimination, rejection and hatred against the Jews. Until the year 1962 the Good Friday liturgy of the Catholic Church included a prayer "for the perfidious Jews"; it was finally suppressed by Pope John XXIII. In 1965 one of the key declarations of the Second Vatican Council was "Nostra Aetate", which was approved only after encountering many obstacles, because of the enduring ecclesiastical anti-Semitism. That document stated, finally, that *what happened in the passion of Christ cannot be blamed indiscriminately on all the Jews who lived then or on the Jews who are living today. Although the Church is the new people of God, the Jews should not be portrayed as rejected or cursed by God, as if this were something stated in the sacred scriptures. … The Catholic Church, conscious of the inheritance it shares with the Jews and moved not by political reasons but by spiritual love of the Gospel, deplores the hatred, the persecution and all anti-Semtic displays directed by any person against the Jews of any epoch.* Many bishops fought fiercely against this document and rejected its basic tenets.

Since the Council the relations between Rome and the Jewish people have had their ups and downs. The pontificate of John Paul II was plagued with ambiguities. They are recounted with an acutely critical vision by the British researcher David Yallop in his book *The Power and the Glory* (Carroll and Graf, 2007).

The "Christian" Adolph Hitler

Adolph Hitler, the most emblematic of history's anti-Semites, was brought up a Christian. He disseminated an idea that originally appeared in the first-century, namely, that Jesus had been the son of a soldier belonging to one of the Roman legions stationed in Palestine. According to Hitler, Jesus was not a Jew, since that soldier was of the Aryan race, the "pure race".

Taking advantage of the anti-Semitism that had been rife in Christianity for centuries, Hitler decided to exterminate the Jewish race from Europe. The horrendous logic of this abominable crime is described well in Frank Pierson's bone-chilling film, "Conspiracy" (2001), which portrays the debates which took place among the Nazi regime's highest officials at Wansee Castle, on the outskirts of Berlin, in January 1942. Their aim was to organize the "final solution", the wholesale extermination of all the Jews of Europe in gas chambers.

Well before gaining absolute power in Germany and invading other countries in Europe, Hitler had already contemplated such a "solution". In a speech in Munich on April 12th, 1922, he uttered these words: *With unlimited love as a Christian and a man, I have read the passage which tells us how the Lord rose up in power and wielded a whip to drive from the Temple that race of vipers and serpents. What a magnificent struggle he waged against the Jewish venom for the sake of the world! Today, two thousand years later, with deepest emotion I recognize more profoundly than ever the fact that this was the reason that he had to shed his blood on the cross. As I Christian, I have no obligation to let myself be deceived, but I do have an obligation to struggle for truth and justice. And as a man, I have the duty to make sure that human society does not suffer the same catastrophic collapse that the civilization of the ancient world suffered two thousand years ago, a civilization that was driven to its ruin by this same Jewish people.*

Hitler's willing executioners

Daniel Goldhagen in his book, *The Catholic Church and the Holocaust: An Outstanding Debt* (Taurus, 2002), shows that the Holocaust would not have been possible without the ready collaboration of the majority of the German population. According to the author, the extermination was facilitated by the prejudices against Jews and by the anti-Semitism that already extended through all of Europe.

"Amen": the Vatican's complicity with Hitler

There are many proofs of the extremely serious moral error committed by Pope Pius XII (1939-1958) with regard to the Jewish Holocaust. There are also many proofs of his complicity with this genocide, either by omission or by commission. Pope John Paul II, who asked pardon for some of the monstrous errors of the Papacy in the course of history, never mentioned this "sin", one of the most recent. And he even took steps to have Pius XII made a "saint".

The complicity of Pope Pius XII and the Vatican bureaucracy with Nazism was widely publicized in the movie “Amen” (2005), from the Greek director Costa Gavras. His two protagonists are a Jesuit priest, who is fictional, and a German who really existed, Kurt Gerstein. Gerstein was a member of the Hygiene Institute of the Nazi army, the institution responsible for massive massacres of Jews in the death camps of Belzec and Treblinka. When he discovered that the Zyklon B gas that he was supplying to the Institute was not being used to disinfect, but to kill people, Gerstein, moved by his Christian sensibility, informed international authorities and the Vatican about what was happening, but he received no response. Diplomatic interests and political calculations took priority. In 1945, at the end of the Second World War, he wrote the so-called “Gerstein Report”, in which he recounted what happened in the death camps, things he had seen with his own eyes. He committed suicide after finishing the report.

The book *The Whore of Babylon*, by Colombian writer Fernando Vallejo (Planeta 2007), accuses other Catholic hierarchs of Europe of complicity in the genocide of the Jewish people.

The chosen people

The Jewish religion was founded by Moses and is based on a Covenant in which God (called Yahweh by the Hebrew people) established with the people of Israel, who were especially chosen by him. By obeying the Law, the people would fulfill the precepts of the Covenant and in return Yahweh would guide their future destiny. In this way the God of Israel entered human history as a central character. This was something totally new for the religions of the ancient world.

The founding tradition of the Israelite people teaches them that they are chosen, and chosen by none less than God himself. Five centuries before Jesus there arose in Israel the idea of opening up the religion of Yahweh to all the world, of universalizing it. This conception was opposed to the traditional notion of a closed religion, one that was available only to Jews and excluded all non-Jews.

In the time of Jesus the idea of a closed religion was gaining ground and becoming dominant, but Jesus called it into question. He did not exclude people, but included everybody in his project. After the destruction of the Temple and the dispersion of the Jews into the Diaspora, the closed conception again became dominant in Judaism, concentrating on the Law and the teaching of the rabbis. And so it has remained up to the present day.

Jesus in the Talmud: a teacher

Judaism as we know it began to take shape about five centuries before Jesus, but it developed and became more structured during the centuries after the Temple was destroyed. In that time the Talmud was finally formulated, a collection of writings that gathers together the interpretations and the commentaries made on the Bible (especially the Torah, the first five books) by teachers and rabbis of different schools from the second century before Christ to the fifth century after Christ, including the time of the Diaspora. In order to understand Judaism, it is not sufficient to know the Bible, as many Christians believe. Knowing the Talmud is also indispensable, since it is the Jewish oral law.

The Talmud speaks of Jesus as a teacher who created his own school and had disciples. The Talmud was censored by the Christian Church in 1123, and everything it said about Jesus was

suppressed. For that reason the editions known by present-day Jews lack those references to Jesus, and few Jews are aware of how positively the original Talmud viewed him.

The great scientist Albert Einstein was not among those Jews who reject Jesus. He wrote in his reflections: *The powerful moral tradition of the Jewish people makes clear that "serving God" is the same as "serving living beings", and that has been the aim of the struggles of the best sons and daughters of the Jewish people, above all of the prophets and of Jesus. … In Jesus we find a doctrine capable of curing humankind of all its social ills.*

The Jewish archeologist Israel Finkelstein, director of the Archeology Institute of the University of Tel Aviv, also knows the value of the message taught by the Jewish Jesus of Nazareth, and for that reason he participates in our program.

Interview 86
THE HOLY SHROUD?

RACHEL Today is Holy Saturday, and we are with Jesus Christ in a coffee shop near the Holy Sepulcher, in Jerusalem. He is savoring a cup of Arab tea, and your special correspondent from Emisoras Latinas is enjoying a cappuccino.

JESUS Rachel, why have you brought me here?

RACHEL In our earlier interviews you have evaded the questions about your divinity, but today I have clear proof.

JESUS Proof of what?

RACHEL That you are God. That you rose from the dead. I have proof.

JESUS Is that so? What proof do you have?

RACHEL A cloth, the Holy Shroud.

JESUS How can a shroud be holy, Rachel? I think perhaps they've fooled you. Do you have the cloth with you?

RACHEL How could I have it with me? It's in Italy, in Turin, safely guarded in a case with seven keys.

JESUS But where in the world did you hear such a thing?

RACHEL The sindologists, experts in shrouds, called our network and told me that you would be left without arguments. There is much anticipation concerning what you might tell us in today's interview. That's the reason why I have brought you to this place. With so many people around, you'll be able to speak freely.

JESUS If you don't explain yourself better, I'm going to think you're off your rocker.

RACHEL When you died, they wrapped you in a sheet, right?

JESUS How am I supposed to know that?

RACHEL Well, that same piece of cloth appeared miraculously centuries later, and on it was a photographic image of your body. Imagine, it was as if it had been taken by a camera like this one.

JESUS That's impossible. In my time there were no inventions of that sort.

RACHEL Well, that's the miracle! Your body was photographed by the luminous force of your resurrection. When you emerged from the shroud, the image of your body remained printed on it. All right, then, just try to deny a proof like that!

JESUS Take it easy, Rachel, stay calm.

RACHEL We have a call!... Yes, hello?

ESLAVA Hello, this is Juan Eslava Galán calling from Spain. I am a specialist in the fraud surrounding the holy shroud. I've investigated everything there is to know about this ridiculous relic.

RACHEL What do you mean fraud?

ESLAVA The holy shroud is a piece of cloth on which a 14th-century trickster stamped a drawing of a body, claiming that it was the shroud in which Jesus had been wrapped. The guy already knew something of the principles of photography and managed to create the effects of a negative. However, the process didn't work out perfectly for him the image was of a man well over six feet, and his arms reached down to below his knees. I don't think Jesus was that tall or that deformed, would you agree?

RACHEL No, he's my height.

ESLAVA That con artist sold the cloth as a relic, and now the Catholic Church tries to sell it as proof of the resurrection of Christ.

RACHEL We have another call coming in…

WOMAN What that Galán fellow says doesn't convince me at all. The holy shroud has not only been proved authentic, it has been shown to be three-dimensional, and by no less an authority than NASA, the U.S. space agency. What further proofs do you want?

RAQUEL What's your response, Mr Eslava Galán?

ESLAVA I'm sorry to disappoint the caller, but about ten years after that highly debatable experiment was done with some apparatus from NASA, the Vatican itself ordered that the shroud be submitted to a radiocarbon test. Twenty-one researchers from three specialized laboratories proved that the shroud actually dated from the 14th century. And Jesus died in the first century.

WOMAN That Galán is trying to confuse us believers! He's the one who's a fraud!

ESLAVA Calm down, ma'am. Everybody is free to have their own ideas.

WOMAN The holy shroud is the most irrefutable proof of the resurrection of Jesus Christ!

RACHEL Well, then, let's ask Jesus Christ himself. What's your opinion about the shroud, Jesus?

JESUS Rachel, aren't they stretching thing a bit? How can a piece of cloth, like this sheet or shroud, be a proof of life?

WOMAN Jesus Christ is also lying, because he knows very well that it was his shroud! I'm going to call Fr Lorin immediately so that he can show him the shroud, and the pillow as well.

RACHEL While the arguments go on, we hope you our listeners will stay tuned. From a coffee shop near the Holy Sepulcher, this is Rachel Perez for Emisoras Unidas.

MUSIC

ANNOUNCER Another God is Possible. Exclusive interviews with Jesus Christ in his second coming to Earth. A production of María and José Ignacio López Vigil, with the support of the Syd Forum and Christian Aid.

INTERVIEW 86: BACKGROUND MATERIAL

The relics business

The Old Testament book of Numbers (19,11-16) prohibits anyone from touching cadavers or using any object that has been in contact with them. Because of these traditions deriving from their Jewish origins, the early Christians did not venerate relics, or even put much value on them. After the 3rd century, however, when Christianity became the official religion of the whole Roman empire, this changed drastically, since such prohibitions were not religious norms for the Greeks and Romans.

By the end of the fourth century the first relics of Christ had already appeared: splinters and pieces of the cross, of doubtful authenticity given the centuries that had passed since the crucifixion of Jesus. It was Helen, mother of the emperor Constantine, who began to bring to Rome "relics" that she had found in her journeys around Palestine.

From that point on, the veneration of relics grew enormously. Skilful merchants understood how lucrative the relics business could be and dedicated themselves to falsifying all types of "sacred" objects. In the sixth century there was no church, no matter how humble, that did not possess its own relics: bones, teeth, or locks of different "saints", as well as cloth from their clothing or any object that had been in touch with their bodies when they were alive or even dead. Naturally, the most valuable relics were those of Mary and Jesus.

Magical fetishism, unlikely stories

The magical fetishism over relics was encouraged by the ecclesiastical hierarchy, which obtained from it good returns, both spiritual and material. It kept increasing until it became an obsession: at times the desire to possess a relic led to extortion, murder and even wars. The Crusades unloaded

on Europe an avalanche of relics, the immense majority of them false, especially those pertaining to the first three centuries of Christianity.

This inflation reached its highest levels during the 14th and 15th centuries, when the relic-making industry kept some very reputable workshops of the eastern Mediterranean quite busy. The market was never saturated – quite the contrary: demand was constantly in excess of supply. During the space of several centuries there was great rivalry among potentates, sanctuaries, and churches for the possession of relics.

This commentary was written by Spanish historian and philologist Juan Eslava Galán and is found in his carefully documented book, *The Fraud of the Holy Shroud and the Relics of Christ* (Planeta, 2004). The book recounts the histories of highly unlikely and even grotesque relics (drops of the Virgin's milk, feathers and eggs of the Holy Spirit, several heads of John the Baptist, etc.). Perhaps the most bizarre relic of all is the foreskin of Jesus, preserved and venerated in at least three places in Europe in the 14th century.

The shroud as "proof"

The most famous relic of Christ, because of the publicity given it by the Catholic hierarchy, is the Holy Shroud, which is kept in the royal chapel of Saint John the Baptist Cathedral in Turin, Italy. A piece of linen 4.32 meters long and 1.10 meters wide, the shroud is marked by stains that show the body of a man seen from front and back. For five centuries this cloth, kept in Turin, was just one of many "shrouds of Christ" that were venerated as relics in Europe. It was not until 1898 that it began to be considered "the one true" shroud.

On the occasion of an exposition in Turin, organized by the Vatican, so great was the crowd that turned out to see the cloth that the bishop of Turin decided to take advantage of its fame, which has grown to the proportions that it has today. The first step he took was to "demonstrate" that the stains on the sheet were a "photograph" of the corpse of Jesus Christ. He then promoted the idea that the "photograph" had been produced by the special divine energy that was discharged by Christ when he rose from the dead. The shroud from that time on has become "scientific" proof of Christ's resurrection and therefore proof of the superiority of the Catholic religion over all others. In order to publicize this "miracle", there arose in the Catholic church a new "science", sindonology (study of the sheet), which now includes experts in several countries, books and publications in different languages, and regular congresses and symposia in major cities around the world.

The shroud: a fraud

A carbon-14 test was done on the "holy" sheet in 1988 by 21 specialists from laboratories in Oxford, Zurich and Tucson; it was supervised by the British Museum of London. The test showed that the linen fabric dates from a span of time that runs from 1260 to 1390, dates that accord with historical records indicating the time when this relic was donated to a church in Paris. The report of the three laboratories, which used different techniques and obtained similar results, were published in the prestigious scientific journal *Nature*, in its issue of February 16th, 1989.

The radiocarbon test was performed in 1988 at the request of the Vatican, after two young physicists had in 1977 overstated the shroud's miraculous qualities. Both of them exposed slides of the shroud to a new image analyzer developed by NASA, the U.S. space agency. The powerful apparatus transformed the flat image into a three-dimensional one. This superficial and inexact experiment of the two physicists revealed that the "man" on the shroud could be seen in relief. This provided further fuel for the imagination of the sindonologists regarding the "scientific" proof of the resurrection of Jesus provided by the cloth. However, the later radiocarbon analyses, by showing that the cloth comes from the 14th century, returned the debate to a more serious and sensible level. Despite all this, many people still hold on to the idea that "NASA proved the authenticity of the miracle represented by the shroud".

The shroud is a fraud, like most of the phony relics that for centuries circulated around Europe. The "painter" who made the shroud certainly used a very original process for printing the cloth: somehow by singeing it he was able to produce a true "negative". Even though photography had not yet been invented, that man must have know something of its principles. But the negative that he created was not perfect: the "man" of the shroud has extremely long arms, stretched by the "proto-photographer" so that they would cover the genitals – modesty was essential in the politically correct religiosity of that epoch – and the head and the face appear disproportionately well delineated in comparison with the rest of the body.

Two other aspects of the negative are especially suspicious: the Jews buried their dead by wrapping them in sheets, but with their arms crossed over their chest, not stretched downwards, and the negative of the face and the hair of the "man of the shroud" do not have the same color contrast that a face would have in a real negative.

Juan Eslava Galán

Juan Eslava Galán participates in our program because of the research he has done calling into question the holiness of this famous sheet. His book is basic for any serious debate about the falsity of this and other relics. If you search the Internet under "holy shroud", you can find abundant material both pro and contra.

While the polemic continues, the exaggerated publicity which the Catholic Church gives this relic is truly extraordinary, not to say scandalous. It ends up reducing faith in the resurrection of Jesus to gross materialism. Jesus is quite right when he says to Rachel: "*Aren't they stretching things a bit? How can a piece of cloth be a proof of life?"*

Interview 87
EUTHANASIA?

RACHEL Emisoras Latinas continues its broadcasts from Jerusalem. Today is Easter Sunday, and Jesus Christ and I are seated on a street corner of a teeming Arab neighborhood. Is there anything that strikes you, Jesus? The noise, the people's clothes, the buildings?

JESUS The old people.

RACHEL Why the old people?

JESUS I see a lot of elderly people, Rachel, Before it wasn't like this. The people didn't live such a long time. Death came earlier.

RACHEL Now it's different. With so many medicines, anybody can live to be eighty.

JESUS Like Methuselah.

RACHEL And that raises a question if an older person is sick and beyond cure, when should he die?

JESUS I don't understand you. He should die when his hour comes.

RACHEL But who decides that hour? Nowadays someone can be sick, but he doesn't die, because they put him in a good hospital, they connect all kinds of machines to him, and … and he doesn't die.

JESUS They don't let him die?

RACHEL Well, that's the issue. People say that God is the absolute master of life and that we cannot decide. … Wait, we have a call … Hello…. Yes? … Jesus, we have on the line a listener who wants to know your opinion about euthanasia.

JESUS What's the meaning of that word, Rachel?

RACHEL Just what I was talking about having a dignified death, deciding one's own death. Listen to this fellow.

YOUTH Jesus, my mother is very old and has a terminal illness. She suffers terrible pain, and the painkillers don't help her any more. She no longer wants to live, and we don't want to see her suffering this way …

JESUS So?

YOUTH In the hospital they tell us that her heart is strong, that they'll give her new medicines, which will allow her to live many months, maybe years, longer…

JESUS But what kind of life would that be, if the jug is already leaking at the spring, if the silver thread is already broken?

YOUTH She doesn't want to be in the hospital. She wants to die at home.

JESUS So why don't they do what she wants? Wise people know when to open the doors to death.

YOUTH So would it be all right for us to stop the medicines and … and speed up her …. her passing?

JESUS Speak with her. Be close to her. If she is in peace and ready for the journey, let her decide. Otherwise, then you, her children, those who truly love her, should make the decision.

RACHEL The call was cut off … The boy was crying …

JESUS He must be suffering a lot.

RACHEL The thing is, the laws prohibit euthanasia. Furthermore, there are some religious people who say that that woman should accept her pains and offer them up to you …

JESUS To me? Why to me?

RACHEL Because you suffered for her, and now it's her turn to suffer for you.

JESUS What nonsense. I suffered because of the powerful men who ordered my death. And she's suffering because she's sick, Rachel.

RACHEL But don't they say that suffering purifies, that it is pleasing to God?

JESUS What pleases God is life, life in its fullness. How can God want the suffering of his sons and daughters, especially when such pain can be avoided. Suffering is a good teacher, Rachel, but you don't have to go out of your way to find it. It comes without our looking for it.

RACHEL And when no recovery is possible, when life is artificially prolonged and the suffering is useless?

JESUS Rachel, I said something to you a few days ago. God gives us two gifts life and liberty. Whoever has ears to hear, let him hear.

RACHEL For today this has been Rachel Perez, trying to understand this man Jesus, and broadcasting for Emisoras Latinas from a corner of the Arab quarter of Jerusalem.

MUSIC

ANNOUNCER Another God is Possible. Exclusive interviews with Jesus Christ in his second coming to Earth. A production of María and José Ignacio López Vigil, with the support of the Syd Forum and Christian Aid.

INTERVIEW 87: BACKGROUND MATERIAL

A topic for our time

Jesus of Nazareth spoke about life much more than about death. He never spoke about euthanasia or anything similar because in his time people did not live very long and there were no scientific methods for extending the life span. Although euthanasia ("dying well") is an ancient concept, the polemics about euthanasia is more urgent in our own day, since medicine has extended the human lifespan considerably in the last century: people now live many years longer.

Gary S. Becker, who won the Nobel prize for economics in 1992, claims that the greatest achievement of the 20th century is the increase in people's life expectancy. As we were finishing the 20th century and entering into the 21st, he wrote the following: *On New Year's Eve I asked our guests to give their opinions about what had been the most important achievement of the 20th century. There were several suggestions: the growth of democracy, the invention of computers, … I told them what I thought: what most benefited ordinary people in the 20th century was the longer life expectancy. The improvements in health care from 1900 till the end of the century have been spectacular. In the western world, life expectancy increased from 45 years at the beginning of the century to more than 75 years on the eve of the 21st century.*

A "beautiful death" is a crime

Swiss Catholic theologian Hans Kung defines euthanasia as *beautiful death, that is, good, quick, easy, without suffering.*

Traditional Catholic theology, however, and the Vatican's current official position condemn euthanasia and consider it a crime. They insist on the defense of life "from conception until its natural end." Just as with contraceptives and abortion, the Catholic tradition is totally opposed to every "artificial" form of deciding about life.

As an example of the way this official position is expressed, we quote an excerpt from the Letter to Catholic Health Care Workers of the whole world, authored in 1995 by Carmelite Fr Boniface Honings, consultant for the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith: *Euthanasia disrupts the doctor-patient relationship. It does so from the patient's side because he or she relates to the doctor as to the person who can procure death, and it does so from the doctor's side because he or she is no longer the absolute guarantor of life, but is rather the one from whom the patient should fear*

death. The contact between doctor and patient is a relationship of confidence in life, and it should remain such.

Euthanasia is a crime in which health care workers, who always and only care for life, cannot in any way cooperate. The same holds true for abortion, even when it is a matter of the mother's health, a serious fetal malformation, or a pregnancy that is caused by rape. Indeed, life is such a primordial and fundamental good that we can hardly compare it, in terms of equality or even less inferiority, with various hardships, even when these are quite serious. On this point the coincidence of Hippocratic ethics and Christian morality is undeniable: both Hippocratic ethics and Christian morality reject every form of direct abortion and direct euthanasia, whether active or passive, because no objective can legitimize an act that suppresses prenatal life or a homicidal act.

"Disproportionate care"

There have been so many advances in medical technology that a breach has been opened in the official Catholic opposition to euthanasia, one that allows what may be called passive euthanasia, aimed at alleviating pain when there is no cure possible or when the medical procedures are too costly or complex.

The above cited letter of Honings states: *When the patient simply cannot be cured, the health care professional is always obliged to practice all proportionate care, but he or she may interrupt care that is disproportionate. Here the problem of humanizing pain by means of analgesics and anesthesia is very important. Although for Christians pain has an elevated penitential and salvific significance, Christian charity requires health care workers to relieve physical suffering.*

"Palliative care"

The concept of "palliative care" to relieve pain arose in the 1960s. Cecily Saunders, a British nurse, was concerned about the suffering of hospital patients with terminal illnesses, so she revolutionized the treatment they were to be given: she proposed to care for them from an integral perspective, attending to their physical, psychic, social and spiritual needs.

Rights of the moribund

The philosophy of palliative care is reflected in the Declaration of the Rights of the Moribund:

+ Right to be treated as persons, as human beings until the end.
+ Right to preserve hope till the end, whatever the hope may be.
+ Right to be cared for by people who can inspire confidence in them.
+ Right to express, in their own way, their feelings and emotions in the face of the proximity of their own death
+ Right to take part in the decisions that are taken about how they are to be cared for.
+ Right to receive medical attention even when there is no possibility of being cured.
+ Right to change medical methods in search of greater comfort.
+ Right not to die alone.
+ Right to have their pain alleviated.

+ Right to receive honest and sincere answers to any of their questions.
+ Right not to be deceived about their condition.
+ Right to receive help from their family and to have their family receive help in accepting the death of a member.
+ Right to preserve their individuality and not be judged by their decisions, even when they are contrary to other people's beliefs.
+ Right to be cared for by sensitive, competent persons who understand their needs and are capable of helping them to meet death.
+ Right to die in peace and with dignity.
+ Right to have their body respected after death.

To live is a right, but not a duty

Spanish journalist Pepe Rodríguez in his book *Dying is Nothing* offers the following reflection: *It is obvious that life is a right, but it cannot and should never be considered a duty. Nobody can be obliged to live against his will, or to agonize or vegetate as the victim of a terminal illness, in violation of his conscience and his express desire not to continue living that way. … When the quality of life deteriorates to the point of taking away what we consider "our dignity", consideration should automatically be given to a person's right to decide to break with the obligation of continuing to live.*

An impressive and unforgettable account of dignity in the face of a terminal illness and death appears in the movie "Witt", directed by Mike Nichols (2001).

Each case is different

Concerning euthanasia it is impossible to offer general opinions in favor or against, much less to issue severe condemnations or judgments. It is essential to know and understand each case, to study all the circumstances that surround it, to be able to think and act with love and compassion. Certain emblematic cases have made it possible to understand better what is at issue when we speak of euthanasia. Among such cases are three outstanding ones that occurred at the beginning of the 21st century in Europe, where euthanasia is now an almost daily dilemma.

One case was that of Ramón Sampedro, a Spanish worker who was quadriplegic for 30 years after an accident; he asked to die since he could no longer bear the contradiction between the paralysis of his body and the lucidity of his mind. Finally in 1998 he managed to get a friend to help him to die. His case was brought to the screen by Alejandro Amenábar in the movie "Mar adentro", which won an Oscar in February, 2005.

Another case was that of the young Frenchman, Vincent Humber, who became a quadriplegic at the age of 19 after an auto accident. After three years of lying prostrate in a bed, blind, mute, and without taste or smell, he asked the doctors of the hospital, using only the pressure of one of his fingers to communicate, to help him to die. Since they refused, his mother helped him and was subsequently arrested. In 2003 her case contributed to a debate in France in favor of a law that guarantees the right to die with dignity.

A third case was that of the Italian Piergiorgio Welby, 60 years of age and the victim of a progressive muscular dystrophy that had left him completely immobile, except for his eyes. Having been connected to a respirator for ten years, Welby asked the doctors to discontinue this treatment by which he was being kept alive and to sedate him so that he could die painlessly. A doctor in the hospital of Cremona, where he was a patient, gave him what he wanted, and Welby died on December 20th, 2006. The case aroused the Italian public, and a lively public and private debate about euthanasia was carried on. In announcing Welby's departure from this world, the leader of the Radical Party, Marco Penella, said: *His example will be a source of strength, love and hope for all men and women who love life, liberty and responsibility.*

In the year 2007 only two countries of the European Union had legalized euthanasia for persons with incurable illnesses who desired it. The ethical and legal debate continues in other countries. In Latin America, Mexico has taken the lead in seeking to humanize dying. In December, 2007, approval was given in the Federal District of Mexico City to the so-called Law of Anticipated Will, which assists terminally ill patients who choose to have suspended the measures that prolong their lives. The new law distinguishes between "euthanasia" and "orthothanasia"; this latter concept means "correct death" and makes a distinction between "curing" and "caring". When there is no possible cure, then there is no need to take action, if a sick person older than 16 years of age decides so by means of a document signed in the presence of a notary and two witnesses.

Euthanasia in other religions

In their book *The Challenges of Bioethics*, Marie-Gaëlle le Perff and Jean-Paul Guetny tell us:

All religions consider life sacred, and they express this principle in their rejection of euthanasia. In the face of death and physical decay, however, the different religions respond in a variety of ways. Even with the ever more frequently employed concept of "dying with dignity" and the growing number of gravely ill persons who demand, sometimes even in the courts, to put an end to their lives, religions are firm in their opposition both to euthanasia and to the "therapeutic cruelty" which, at great cost and with all types of medical equipment, seeks to keep terminally ill patients alive. All religions are agreed as regards the application of "palliative care" to prevent pain. The principle which gives rise to such care has always been rooted in religious traditions. So it is that in the Orthodox liturgy the faithful regularly in their prayers ask God for "a peaceful end of Christian life, without pain or humiliation."

In all the sacred texts of Judaism, the principle of acting against pain is very present. It is a principle which the believer should balance against the commandment which says, "You shall not kill." Catholicism is the religion which most rigorously rejects euthanasia, but that does not mean that it accepts any and every medical procedure to prolong life. It proposes that only reasonable treatment be used, that in which the benefits are greater than the hardships. Protestants and Buddhists are opposed to euthanasia, but they always leave a space, according to each individual case and situation. For Buddhists the main thing is compassion, which is a core value of their religion. If love is expressed in sharing in the happiness of the other, then compassion is expressed in the desire to see the other freed of suffering. Compassion is what will allow us to take into account the personal aspects of each situation and to find a solution that is suitable for each case.

The complete text appears in www.envio.org.ni

Ending life with a party

In his book *Immediate God* (Trotta, 1997), German theologian Eugen Drewermann makes the following reflection and offers a bold proposal:

I believe that the more means that medicine finds to prolong life, the more it is obliged to find better means for putting an end to life. I'm convinced that soon we will achieve this and that medicine will know how to develop methods and discover drugs that can be administered without causing the least pain. In fact, why not try to find drugs that will produce a euphoric effect? It seems to me that ending life with a party, with a celebration, is something correct and beautiful, whereas a death that is undergone as a kind of fate imposed from outside, accompanied by endless pain and orchestrated by intensive medical meddling, is unworthy of human beings.

Interview 88
THE FINAL JUDGMENT?

RACHEL Emisoras Latinas has moved its microphones to the Valley of Kedron, below the eastern walls of ancient Jerusalem. Jesus Christ already explained to us that his contemporaries believed that the final judgment would be held here.

JESUS And it seems that many people still believe that, Rachel. Look how many graves there are. No doubt people have themselves buried here so as to be first in line when the hour arrives!

RACHEL The final judgment! We carried out a survey in the streets asking people this one question What would you do if the trumpets of the final judgment were to sound today?

WOMAN I've been paying my tithes and fasting three times every month. I'm ready for whenever God wants.

MAN I've confessed Christ, and Saint Paul says "Whoever confesses the Lord will be saved." I am saved, glory to God, alleluia!

WOMAN 2 The truth is, I'm not ready for that judgment. I haven't been in a church for forty years.

MAN 2 Heavens, sir! If I hear that trumpet, I'll crap in my pants! (WHISTLE)

OLD LADY I don't think I'll have problems because I've earned ten plenary indulgences.

MAN 3 There's not a day I don't read the Bible! Since there's room for 144,000 elect, I'm sure they'll give me an entry visa.

RACHEL On this occasion Emisoras Latinas made a special effort and had our correspondents obtain answers in some non-Christian countries.

JESUS And what did they say in those countries?

RACHEL The Muslims spoke of their pilgrimages to Mecca, the Jews mentioned the Sabbath and kosher food. The Hindus explained how they sing to Vishnu, but the Buddhists offered no opinion. The Chinese were the most tranquil. They say that the 21st century will be their century and that the world is not going to end so quickly. Are the Chinese possibly right? What do you say, Jesus? When will the final judgment be?

JESUS Really, I don't know …

RACHEL You don't know when?

JESUS No, we don't know the day or the hour.

RACHEL So it's top secret, confidential information, and you don't want to share it with our audience?

JESUS The people in my time knew nothing like these surveys you've done, but even they asked about when the end would come.

RACHEL And what did you tell them?

JESUS The same as what I tell you now that we do not know the day, but we need to be ready. I never said when we would go to judgment, but I did explain what the judge will ask us in that tribunal.

RACHEL Could you give us an idea of what that cross-examining will be like?

JESUS On that day of judgment, God will ask us if we gave food to those who are hungry, if we gave drink to those who are thirsty, if we clothed those who are naked, if we consoled those who are sad. God will want to know where our treasure was if money was more important for us than people, if we bowed down before money as if it were a god. On that day we will be examined about love.

RACHEL And no questions about sacrifices, prayers, worship, pilgrimages, promises, tithes, dogmas?

JESUS No, nothing of that sort will count on that day.

RACHEL And everything that was done in the name of Yahweh, or Christ, or Jehovah, or Allah, or Vishnu, or Shiva,….?

JESUS None of that will count. On that day God's name will be Justice.

RACHEL And after the judgment? Is that when the world will end? Is that when the seventh and final trumpet of the Apocalypse will sound?

JESUS Each day has troubles enough of its own, Rachel. Why don't we sound that trumpet tomorrow?

RACHEL Well, we'll wait for tomorrow … the end of the world! From the Kedron Valley, alongside the walls of Jerusalem, this is Rachel Perez of Emisoras Latinas.

MUSIC

ANNOUNCER Another God is Possible. Exclusive interviews with Jesus Christ in his second coming to Earth. A production of María and José Ignacio López Vigil, with the support of the Syd Forum and Christian Aid.

INTERVIEW 88: BACKGROUND MATERIAL

First in line

According to Israel's traditions, the Valley of Jehoshaphat was the place where the Final Judgment would take place (Joel 3,2.12). In the Bible the valley was more symbolic than geographic. About 400 years before Jesus, people began to identify that place as the Kedron Valley, which separates the Mount of Olives from the eastern part of Jerusalem. Following that tradition, many generations of Israelites have had themselves buried in the Kedron Valley, so that today that zone, which abuts Jerusalem's walls, has become a huge cemetery. Countless sepulchers are oriented towards the gates of the holy city. There the faithful departed Jews wait, hoping to be first in line on the day of the Final Judgment.

A central message

Matthew's gospel (25,31-46) presents Jesus' message about what God's "cross-examination" will be like on that day, and that message is central for understanding what Jesus' project was all about, what he wanted from the movement he led. Jesus did not propose another religion run by a hierarchy, with new rites, prayers, sacrifices and promises. He proclaimed that God wants above all an ethics of human relations based on inclusion, equality, compassion, and sensitivity for the needs of our fellow human beings.

James, the leader of the Jerusalem community after Jesus was executed, understood clearly that this solidarity was central in the movement which his brother Jesus had organized. He wrote as follows: *My brothers, what use is it for someone to say he has faith when he does nothing to show it? Can that faith save him? Suppose a brother or a sister is in rags with not enough food for the day, and one of you says, "Good luck to you, keep yourselves warm, and have plenty to eat," but does nothing to supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So with faith; if it does not lead to action, it is in itself a lifeless thing.*

In the evening of life we will be examined about love – that is the way it was expressed by the Spanish mystic and poet John of the Cross many centuries after Jesus and James lived. And in the 20th century the Russian philosopher Nicolas Berdyaev explained it thus: *My own hunger could be a material problem, but the hunger of others is a spiritual problem, because it is a problem of solidarity.*

Not paternalism, but social and political commitment

"Love" or "spiritual solidarity" is not paternalism; it is not giving alms or charity or mere assistance. Jesus used the language of the prophets, who cried out that God wants "mercy and not sacrifice", and the catechism speaks of what we know as the "works of mercy" (feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, clothing the naked, etc.). What Jesus proposed goes beyond individual attitudes: it's a whole life project that has collective and political consequences, especially in view of the extreme power imbalances and ever greater inequalities that exist in our world today.

Feeding people in our days means organizing models of development that guarantee that everybody can eat. Giving people drink in our days means preserving the sources of water and protecting them against senseless contamination at the hands of irresponsible businesses. Clothing the naked in our days means making sure that the workers in the sweatshops that produce the clothes we wear have just salaries and dignified working conditions.

Interview 89
THE END OF THE WORLD?

RACHEL We continue our broadcast from the Valley of Kedron, and we're speaking with Jesus Christ today about matters that the specialists call "eschatological". Our special guest told us yesterday that he did not know the date of the final judgment, but he did know what questions the judge would ask us. Today we want to go further into the subject of what will happen after that judgment.

JESUS And what do you hope will happen, Rachel?

RACHEL You know that better than anybody. After the final judgment the last trumpet will sound, the curtain will come down, and …

JESUS And?

RACHEL And everything ends, and we leave. But let's be serious, Jesus – when is the world going to end?

JESUS In my day I thought it would end very soon, that my generation would see the end of the ages, that I myself would see it … But I was wrong. I thought that the candle was going out, but it's still burning.

RACHEL Jesus, if you were wrong two thousand years ago, by now you must have more information, new data, you really should know…

JESUS Well yes, now I do, and I don't think I'm wrong now…

RACHEL Then you'll tell us the date of the final cataclysm? Apocalypse now?

JESUS Yes, I'll tell you when the end of the world will be. I'm going to tell you right now.

RACHEL Wait, wait! Studios, … studios…. Put on some special music,… because Jesus is going to announce to us the date of the end of the world. We have an incredible scoop. Yes, give us some impressive background music,… No, man, not that, better something from Star Wars, … Yes, that's good. … Are you ready? Tell us now, Mr Jesus Christ, we're all listening. Everyone who's listening to Emisoras Latinas, please pay attention. In these very moments Jesus Christ will reveal to us when the world will end….

JESUS Truly, truly I tell you that the end will come soon.

RACHEL Soon, soon … Could you give us the exact date, or do you just want to scare us?

JESUS After everything I have seen in these days, I'm the one who is scared. So many dead rivers, so many droughts in season and out, so many deforested hillsides, so much land

covered with ashes, so many of God's creatures dying for lack of food. And all the things you've told me about yourself the sky torn so that the sun burns more fiercely, ice caps melting, hurricanes that devours cities like beasts, incurable illnesses, wars fought over water rights, …

RACHEL Yes, yes, continue with that musical background, … it fits well.

JESUS Avarice will do away with all the trees of the planet, and the sea will swallow the cities. The waters will become as bitter as absinthe, and nobody will be able to drink them. Smoky clouds will rob the days of their brilliance, and the greed that poisoned the air will come like a thief and rob all God's creatures of life, … And then will come the end.

RACHEL But when … when will it be? We have our audience hanging on your words, dying to know. Tell us the date that God has set for the end.

JESUS God doesn't set the date, Rachel. You are the ones who are putting an end to the world. If you don't change, if to serve the god money you continue to rip out the pages of the Book of Life one by one, the end will come soon. And you will be the ones who set the date.

RACHEL With that apocalyptic … or rather eschatological warning, we bring today's program to an end. This is Rachel Perez from Jerusalem. On the Internet you can find us at www.emisoraslatinas.net.

MUSIC

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INTERVIEW 89: BACKGROUND MATERIAL

Jesus was mistaken, and the early communities were also

The gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke include a series of discourses of Jesus concerning the catastrophic end about to come upon the world. Such discourses are called "eschatological" (end-time) or "apocalyptic" (revelation of the end) and were quite common in the prophetic tradition in which Jesus was brought up.

Jesus really believed that the end of the unjust world in which he lived was imminent, and this would mean the end of Rome's reign and the arrival of God's Kingdom. The way Jesus proclaimed the gospel and challenged the authorities, the haste he expressed in many of his sayings, and his impassioned impatience indicate that Jesus really thought that the hour was near and that he himself would see the end.

Jesus was wrong, but his impatience and sense of urgency were passed on to the Christians of the first century, who were expectantly awaiting the day when the world would end, confident that they would be alive for it. They also were wrong. Paul had to calm people's expectations on several occasions (2 Thessalonians 2,1-7 and 3,6-12), even though he also was convinced that the final day was very close (1 Thessalonians 4,13-18).

Those were times of terrible persecutions for the Christians, and the communities hoped anxiously for the day of their final liberation. It was in this context that those gospel discourses were written, and this was the context also of the last book of the Bible, the Apocalypse, whose aim was to console Christians who were suffering under Rome's imperial power. Some exegetes consider the Apocalypse the "most political book" of the New Testament, since it announces the end of the powerful Roman empire – even if it does so by expressing the criticisms, judgments and "analyses" of that stage of history in a dense forest of symbols, which are sometimes beautiful and sometimes incomprehensible.

A catastrophe, a feast, a birth

The images with which Jesus spoke about the end of the world in the gospels came from the prophetic tradition. The prophets spoke of God's wrath against the unjust on the final day. They spoke of wars, disasters and untold tribulations. About 200 years before Jesus they began to use cosmic images – stars falling from heaven, earthquakes – symbols that Jesus also used since in his time they were the customary ways of describing the tremendous commotion of the final ages (Isaiah 63,1-6; Jeremiah 6, 11-19; Daniel 9,21-27 and 12,1-13; Joel 2,1-11; Amos 5,14-20).

In speaking of the end-times, the prophets also used positive images to show that all that was good in the world would remain and would be transformed into *a new heaven and a new earth where justice would dwell.* Jesus often referred to the final day as a great banquet and a wonderful feast. Many prophetic texts describe the end with images of joy and celebration (Isaiah 60,1-22 and 62,1-12; Amos 9,11-15; Micah 4,1-5; Zephaniah 3,14-20).

The end of the world was also compared to the birth of a child. In order for a new being to be born there is a need for love, time, patience, hope, and at the decisive moment, effort and great pain. The image of childbirth was used by the prophets (Isaiah 66,5-16), as well as by Jesus (John 16,19-23) and later on by Paul (Romans 8,18-27).

An ethics so that the world doesn't end

In today's program Jesus shows how frightened he himself is, but not only that, for he weaves together images taken from the Apocalypse to try to frighten other people. From such fear he hopes that a new ethics will arise. He agrees with the work of his fellow Jew, the German philosopher Hans Jonas, who is today at the center of the ecological debate. Jonas's book, *The Imperative of Responsibility: In Search of Ethics for the Ecological Age* (University of Chicago, 1984), is an indispensable reference work.

Jonas's reflections on responsibility start off from the fact that human beings are the only living creatures with true responsibility. His reflections draw on the tragedy of the Holocaust. His

conference “The Concept of God after Auschwitz” is perhaps the most important Jewish theological reflection on the Nazi phenomenon.

What does Hans Jonas say? We make use of a summary of his thought that was done by the Catalonian philosopher Ramón Alcoberro.

Science and technology have profoundly modified the relations between human beings and the world. For the people of ancient times, human power was limited, whereas the world was infinite. Jonas gives the example of the Greek city: it was a civilized enclave in the middle of a threatening wilderness, forests and jungles. Jonas points out that today the situation has been reversed: nature is limited and has to be preserved in natural parks, which are totally surrounded by human civilization and technology. Today nature is weak and its existence is threatened. Human beings therefore have the moral obligation to protect nature, and that duty increases to the degree that we understand how easy it is to destroy life.

According to Jonas, the ethical imperative of our time is this: work in such a way that the effects of your action are compatible with the continuation of authentic human existence on earth. Doing good today means taking technology into consideration. Taking seriously the reality of technology, we must recognize that our starting criterion can no longer be one of “dominion”, nor can it yet be one of “community”, since the world community is still a illusion.

Not everything is possible: the prophecy of misfortune

Hans Jonas is a sworn enemy of utopias, which have fostered the idea that in the world everything is possible and nothing is written in stone. Experiences like the atomic bomb, the horrible pollution of the environment, and the Holocaust demonstrate that a utopia can morally end up being a justification for wholesale murder and the destruction of the planet. Utopias tell people: “You *can* do it, and as long as you can, you should do it.” Responsibility requires that we calculate the risks involved, and when there is a possibility that something can fail, it is better not to do it.

The ethical imperative proposed by Jonas is based on fear, or to use his words, on the “heuristics of alarm” – respect mixed with fear. It is fear of the irreversible consequences of progress (such as genetic manipulation or destruction of the habitat) that obliges us to act responsibly. And the motor that impels us to act is the threat that hangs over all future life.

Fear is a negative sentiment, but something positive can come out of such negativity: awareness that the planet is in danger and that this danger is due to the power of human beings, who possess a technology that has become anonymous and autonomous. We must pay more attention to the prophecies of misfortune than to those of utopian bliss, and we must act accordingly, taking very seriously the threat that looms over the future of humankind, a threat that urges us to act responsibly.

The earth is alive, but very sick

To act with ecological responsibility we need information. After centuries of thinking in terms of a generalized, linear kind of “progress”, we human beings are learning the error of thinking in such one-dimensional fashion. We now know that natural resources can be exhausted, and we realize that we

are all passengers on the same ship and that we'll all be saved or we'll all drown together. Now we know that we are an integral part of the Life that inhabits the Earth, that our planet is a living system that regulates its own temperature and defends itself in a thousand ways to keep itself alive, just as we human beings do. The Gaia theory, which considers the Earth to be a living system, has taught us this, but we still have a hard time understanding it.

We also realize today that our predatory and profligate human species has made the Earth seriously ill. The most dangerous fever that our planet suffers today is global warming mixed with global darkening, both processes the result of the irrational use of fossil fuels and other chemical substances. We know today that solar radiation, the principal source of energy keeping us alive, reaches us more and more weakened by the chemicals in the atmosphere. We know that the contamination produced by our factories and vehicles is irreversibly warming the planet, a process that will harm all forms of Life. However, we are still reluctant to understand the consequences of this tragic news.

We recommend a book called *The Revenge of Gaia: Earth's Climate Crisis and the Fate of Humanity* (Basic Books, 2007); it is the most recent work of the scientist who first developed the Gaia theory, James Lovelock. Reading Lovelock is a hair-raising experience (the "heuristics of fear") that encourages us toward a new ethics. It moves us toward new attitudes, decisions and struggles that will help us prevent this world, our world, our civilization, from collapsing as a result of the Earth's negative reaction to the irresponsible way in which the species to which we belong is treating Life.

The clock of the end of the world

In 1947 a group of atomic scientists, including Albert Einstein, imagined a symbolic clock that would mark the hours, minutes and seconds that separate humankind from the end of the world. At that time the scientists believed that the "end" would arrive in the form of a disastrous nuclear war. When the scientists decided to use this clock symbol (1947), the United States had already, in 1945, dropped atomic bombs on the civilian population of two Japanese cities, Hiroshima and Nagasaki, causing more than 300,000 immediate deaths. The aim of the clock was to awaken the conscience of humankind and help people realize that the Apocalypse would not come from God, but would be provoked by human beings themselves, who now possessed such lethal weapons of war.

The concern of the scientists was justified. In 1985 the U.S., the Soviet Union, and other countries involved in the nuclear arms race had an arsenal of 55,000 nuclear weapons on the planet, most of them more powerful than those that had killed a quarter of a million Japanese.

The Clock of the Final Judgment can be found today in the University of Chicago, and until recently the time it told was 11.53 PM, that is, 7 minutes from midnight and the "end of the world". In the year 2007 the hands of the clock were moved forward two minutes. The nuclear threat has lessened, even though the U.S. and Russia still have 27,000 nuclear warheads after negotiating reductions, but the scientists decided to advance the hands on the clock anyway. They did so not so much because of any imminent nuclear catastrophe, but because of the coming climate change, which has contributed to hurricanes like Mitch and Katrina, to catastrophic tsunamis, to heat waves, tornados, flooding, melting of the polar ice caps, etc.

By means of that clock and through congresses, laws, books, speeches, radio and TV programs, and a thousand other ways, the most clear-minded people of our time are alerting us: if we don’t do something and do it soon, then the Earth and humankind will be on the verge of environmental catastrophe, one in which Gaia could simply do away with the human species, which has been the worst plague that it has had to put up with in its long history of 4.5 billion years.

Interview 90
BIBLE AND ECOLOGY?

RACHEL Global warming, droughts, hurricanes, floods – the predictions for our planet could not be more alarming. In a few years half the population of the world will have no water to drink. A good hot day to you, Jesus.

JESUS Yes, Rachel, it's really a lot hotter here than at the Dead Sea.

RACHEL In your time was it cooler?

JESUS Yes, much cooler. My country was always warm, but never like this.

RACHEL Emisoras Latinas is broadcasting today from alongside the eastern walls of Jerusalem. In the last program, from this place that is so symbolic, you confessed to us, Jesus, that you had been wrong two thousand years ago when you thought the world would soon come to an end.

JESUS Yes, it was a error much worse than the one our father Isaac made, when he mistook one son for another.

RACHEL You went on to say that God was not at all responsible for the events that would lead up to the final cataclysm. And you made dramatic call to us human beings, urging us to avoid this tragic end. Am I being faithful to your words?

JESUS You're a faithful journalist, Rachel. That's what I said.

RACHEL Well, then, since yesterday our network has received many messages from environmental activists of different organizations. They were quite encouraged by your words and are anxious to hear you offer more ecological proposals that might help inspire them in their protests. Listen to what they say.

YOUTH Jesus, I speak to you on behalf of a group of young people. After hearing you yesterday, I felt that you are one of our own. You are green, man! Why don't you recall for us your words you spoke back then about the relations between human beings and nature?

RACHEL What do you have to say to our young listener?

JESUS Perhaps I will disappoint him. I would say that … I never spoke about that topic he mentions…

RACHEL You said nothing?

JESUS Nothing.

RACHEL A man so attuned to the lilies of the field, the birds in the sky – a poet of love – are you going to tell us that you had no environmental sensitivity?

JESUS No, I didn't have any. You know, Rachel, I never even spoke the word the young fellow used, "nature" – I never mentioned it.

RACHEL And what word did you use?

JESUS Creation. God the Creator and the world his creation. But what was unfortunate was that from the first page of the scriptures we were taught that business of "fill the earth and dominate it. Have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air…"

RACHEL Like in a war?

JESUS Exactly, just like in a war. Those words made us think we were masters of creation, arrogant owners of the world, with the right to mistreat the earth and its animals. We didn't understand that the Earth doesn't belong to us; rather, we belong to the Earth and we must care for it as for a mother.

RACHEL So, then, you didn't have any ecological consciousness.

JESUS No. I understood the world the way people of my time understood it. What I would tell the youth who just called is that he shouldn't direct his questions to me. He should take inspiration from what the sciences preach about God's marvels.

RACHEL But then, the Bible …

JESUS The Bible doesn't teach us everything, Rachel. God is not contained in any one book, or in all the books of the world.

RACHEL Mr Christ, you speak of creation, but nowadays we speak of evolution. Do you know what that means?

JESUS No, I have no idea.

RACHEL Creation or evolution? That will be the controversial topic of our next interviews. Friends in our listening audience, please tune in for our program tomorrow at this same hour. Remember, we also broadcast on the Internet at www.emisoraslatinas.net. From alongside the eastern walls of Jerusalem, this is Rachel Perez, special correspondent.

MUSIC

ANNOUNCER Another God is Possible. Exclusive interviews with Jesus Christ in his second coming to Earth. A production of María and José Ignacio López Vigil, with the support of the Syd Forum and Christian Aid.

INTERVIEW 90: BACKGROUND MATERIAL

The book of the Universe

The Bible is not a history book, and even less is it a science book. Its entryway, the Book of Genesis, is not a scientific account of the beginning of the universe, as the creationists claim in their fanatical arrogance and ignorance.

The geneticist Richard Dawkins makes the following analogy: *If the history of the universe were written on a scale of one century per page, how thick would the book be? From the creationist point of view, the whole history of the universe, written on such a scale, would fit easily into a thin pocketbook. But how would science answer the same question? To accommodate all the volumes of history written on that scale, some 16 kilometers of bookshelves would be needed. That shows the magnitude of the abyss that separates true science from the creationist teachings.*

No traces in the Bible

The Bible is not a book that inspires us toward an ecological consciousness. The books of the Bible contain no traces of environmental sensitivity. Sometimes Psalm 104 is cited as proof of such "ecological sensitivity" in the Old Testament, but even that is inaccurate, since that psalm is a foreign element that crept into the Bible: it is an adaptation of the "Hymn to the Sun" of the Egyptian pharaoh Akhenaton.

In the story about creation in the Bible's first chapters, God orders human beings to "increase and multiply" and to "dominate" the earth. These are anti-ecological commands that we can today question, knowing as we do that an excess of human population – now more than six billion individuals – and an ideology of human domination over other living species and over natural resources are ruining life on the planet and causing the collapse of the civilization we have built on such "divine orders." These commands of Yahweh, the God of Israel, the God of the Bible, are a personified contradiction of the respectful, reverent divinization of Nature that is so present in all the religions of the Great Mother Goddess.

Not more human beings, but better human brains

In the Spring 2007 issue of the journal *Quorum* of the University of Alcalá in Madrid, the Spanish physicist Antonio Ruiz de Elvira reflects on the greatest problem of our time, the climatic change. He relates his concerns to the two divine commandments in Genesis: 1) increase and multiply, and 2) dominate the earth and all that is in it. The scientist writes:

Combating climatic change is necessary, and at the same time it is tremendously useful for moving specific countries and humankind as a whole in the direction of real development. It is our duty and it will be our delight to do so.

Climatic change results from the absurd burning of coal and petroleum by human society. Like other animals, we human beings need energy to live, and when we found those two fuels we moved irrationally along a road from which there is no return. Having access to energy that requires no effort on our part, we have given free rein to population growth and to an accelerated destruction of the environment we need to survive. When we discovered that energy, we should been more moderate in using it, but the dominant culture forced us to use it foolishly.

Where does a culture come from? Richard Dawkins has coined the term "meme" as the social equivalent of the biological "gene". Choosing a series of alternatives keeps producing social advances. During a long part of human history, when there was no other energy apart from the energy derived directly from photosynthesis or indirectly from the metabolism of photosynthetic vegetation, the only possibility of extracting useful energy came from the number of animals and persons that were available.

In such a society humans functioned simply as tools for labor and as soldiers for systematic robbery. In both cases population increase was useful and became a cultural value. Thus a meme developed, which became codified in the Bible, a book considered sacred by part of the planet's inhabitants, in the form of a commandment that had to be obeyed, since it was seen as exogenous to the social system: "Increase, multiply, and fill the earth." Nowadays, when there exists an increasing availability of energy, this cultural meme has generated a totally unnecessary overpopulation of the planet. At the same time another cultural meme developed: the desire to possess more than the basic human necessities. Since for some people guaranteeing personal and familial survival required dominating other persons and exploiting their labor, the possession of that power and other forms of wealth became an additional cultural meme.

The availability of energy has also led to the growth of consumption and an acceleration of the pace of life that are totally unnecessary, but are maintained and spread further among the world's population. To satisfy these two cultural memes, people seek the simplest and quickest, but also the most contaminating, type of energy, instead of dedicating efforts in two directions: reduction of the population and use of other, non-contaminating kinds of energies.

Human survival depends today on considerations that are different from those of thousands of years ago. Today, instead of needing human beings as labor power, we need the brains of those human beings as creators of ideas. Instead of wealth derived from immediate brute energy, we need sophisticated energy in ever more technified forms. The survival of each individual now depends on the survival of the society as a whole and on our ability to limit climatic change. This will be possible only if we reject these two ancient cultural memes.

Scientists speak

Science (not the Bible) and spirituality (and not the monotheistic religions) speak to us about the interconnection of our human species with everything that is alive; they explain to us the marvels of the life that surrounds us. Insisting on the dignity of life does not mean insisting only on the dignity of human life. Overcoming the anthropocentrism in which we have been educated is an indispensable condition for defending life.

In his book *Pale Blue Dot*, astrophysicist Carl Sagan states: *How is possible that almost none of the principal religions has observed science and concluded: "This is much better than we thought! The Universe is much more important, more grand, more subtle, more elegant than our prophets told us"? Instead they say: "No, no no! My god is a tiny god, and I want him to stay that way." Any religion, whether old or new, that stresses the magnificence of the Universe as revealed by modern science should be able to tap into reserves of reverence and awe that have hardly been touched by the conventional creeds.*

Psychologist and historian of science Michael Shermer states: *What can be more moving than examining a distant galaxy with a 100-inch telescope, or holding in your hand a million-year old fossil or a 500,000-year old stone tool, or standing before the immense abyss of space and time which is the Grand Canyon, or listening to a scientist who is explaining the creation of the Universe without blinking? That is profound, sacred science.*

But science is not opposed to spirituality. Rather it reinforces spirituality with countless proofs of the complexity, the beauty, the diversity, and the marvels of life. There have been great scientists who found in the marvels they discovered a transcendent meaning, a Mystery – whether they called it God or gave it another name doesn't matter. Quantum physicist Max Planck wrote: *I became religious because I thought things through to the end, and then I could no longer keep thinking. We all stop thinking too soon.* Physicist Werner Heisenberg said: *The first sip from the cup of the sciences makes one atheist, but at the bottom of the cup God is waiting.*

Einstein: a religious non-believer

The great scientist Albert Einstein called himself "a deeply religious non-believer"; he was always humbly amazed at the "magnificent structure of nature." Einstein wrote in "My Vision of the World":

Mystery is the most beautiful thing we are given to feel. It is the basic sensation, the source of art and science. This experience of the mysterious, though mixed with fear, has also engendered religion. But true religiosity is knowing of that Existence which is impenetrable for us, knowing that there are manifestations of deepest Reason and of most resplendent Beauty. … In this sense, and only in this sense, do I belong to those who are profoundly religious. … I am satisfied with the mystery of Life's eternity, with the presentiment and consciousness of the prodigious construction of what exists, with the honest aspiration to understand to the utmost what our reason is able to discern in the work of nature.

Kings of creation?

Certain myths of ancient Egypt relate how in the final judgment the animals will demand an accounting from humans about what we did to them, how well or how badly we treated them. Christianity, like Judaism, has not been able to develop an ethic that is capable of limiting human pretensions of dominating other living beings. It has separated human beings from nature and made them expatriates in the midst of nature, which is their mother. The widespread idea that we are "the chosen species", the "kings of creation", has separated us from the animals, the plants, and the rest of living beings. It has made us think we have the right to dominate them and use them for our own benefit, without consideration of what benefits them. And only now, when our domination and

exploitation have begun to cause harm to ourselves, do we begin to reflect on the error of thinking ourselves to be “kings” and “queens”. If it were not the case that the environmental disaster that we have provoked by our reign was now hurting us, then we would continue to feel that we have the right to exhaust the natural resources and eliminate animal and plant species without feeling any respect or compassion for them.

According to the Brazilian eco-feminist theologian Ivone Gebara, even our belief in the resurrection makes us think anthropocentrically and feel that we are the only “chosen” creatures. She recommends that we rethink and reorient our belief in the resurrection from the dead: *Why do we think that only human beings will rise? If we think that way, we cultivate a belief that establishes a hierarchy in which we end up a privileged species.*

Animal rights

On October 15th, 1978, the International League for Animal Rights and the affiliated national leagues issued, at the UNESCO headquarters in Paris, the Universal Declaration of Animal Rights. The text was revised and improved by the International League in 1990.

The Preamble is a gem of sensitivity, magnanimity and scientific precision. It states: *Considering that life is unique and unrepeatable, since all living beings have a single origin and have become differentiated in the course of the evolution of the species; considering that every living being possesses natural rights and that every animal endowed with a nervous system and a brain has its own rights; considering that the contempt for and sheer ignorance of natural rights causes grievous assaults against nature and leads human beings to commit crimes against animals; considering that the coexistence of the different species in the world requires that the human species recognize the right of existence of the other animals; considering that human respect for animals is inseparable from the respect humans show among themselves …*

Then follow the articles of the Declaration:

Article 1 – All animals have the same rights to existence within the framework of biological equilibriums. This equality does not obscure the diversity of species or of individuals.

Article 2 – Every live animal has the right to be respected.

Article 3 – No animal shall be submitted to cruel treatment or cruel acts. If the death of an animal is necessary, this should be instantaneous, painless and not anxiety-causing. The body of a dead animal should be treated with respect.

Article 4 – Every wild animal has the right to live free in its own natural habitat and to reproduce. Depriving them of their liberty, hunting or fishing for sport, and every use of wild animals for non-vital purposes are contrary to this right.

Article 5 – Every animal that human beings have in their possession has the right to be well maintained and to be cared for. In no case should an animal be abandoned or sacrificed without good reason. Every form of raising and using animals should respect the physiology and the behavior that

are proper to each species. All forms of shows, publicity, spectacles, movies or videos which make use of animals should respect their dignity and not cause them any violence.

Article 6 – Experimentation with animals which causes physical or psychic suffering violates the rights of animals. Alternative substitute methods should be developed and put into practice systematically.

Article 7 – Every act involving the unnecessary death of an animal or any decision leading to such an act constitutes a crime against life.

Article 8 – Every act or decision that endangers the survival of a wild species constitutes genocide, which is a crime against the species. The massacre of wild animals and the contamination and destruction of biotypes are genocidal.

Article 9 – The juridical personality of an animal and its rights should be recognized by law through the entities which defend them. The defense and protection of animals should be recognized and have due representation within governmental organizations.

Article 10 – Education through public and private institutions should encourage human beings from childhood on to observe, understand and respect animals.

Nature: our Mother or our Daughter?

Knowledge of science can make us more human. In the last fifty years new scientific discoveries have been so great, so rapid and so revolutionary that we cannot remain indifferent to them. A Catalonian scientist of prehistory, Eudald Carbonell, urges responsibility on people with these words:

The possibility of making ourselves into gods is already a reality. The definitive replacement of natural selection by technical selection may be feasible in the course of the third millennium. This process, which progressively distances us from Mother Nature and actually makes her our Daughter, leads us to lose her guidance, and it can transform us into either orphans or creators, depending on our conceptions and our ability as humans to take responsibility for our destiny.

We are likely to forget that it was chance that made us hominids but that it is logic that should make us humans. Natural selection is what allowed for the evolution of the species by creating genetic differences. That is what made us hominids. Technical selection was the competition that technology produced among the different hominids, until our own species, Homo Sapiens, remained the only one on the planet with that "power". Today, even though there are no genetic differences among us as members of the same species, there are still abysmal technical differences among different groups of human beings. Socializing and sharing technology and cooperating so that its benefits reach everybody is the only way we will become truly human. And survive.

Interview 91
WE COME FROM MONKEYS?

RACHEL Yes, we're ready…. Are we on the air now? Friends, behind me rise the golden walls of Jerusalem, and with us we have our special guest, Jesus Christ. In my last interview, Jesus, I mentioned to you the theory of evolution, and I'd like to ask you now do you know anything about evolution?

JESUS No, Rachel, I don't.

RACHEL Well, let me explain to you that in 1859 the English scientist Charles Darwin, who was in fact a very religious man, discovered the mystery of life.

JESUS And what was that mystery?

RACHEL Charles Darwin demonstrated that all living beings, all animals and plants, everything alive, belongs to the same family. Everything living spring from a common trunk.

JESUS Could you please explain that a little more clearly, Rachel?

RACHEL Through natural selection, by a process of trial and error, living creatures keep adapting to their environment. They keep changing little by little.

JESUS The book of Job speaks of the eagle, the wild ass, the seahorse, all master works of God.

RACHEL Well, all those animals, according to Darwin, are descended from a single origin. They evolved over eons, starting from a first seed.

JESUS And who planted that seed?

RACHEL Let's say that God sowed the tree of life, and the tree grew and sprouted a thousand different branches. On each branch, in the course of millions of years, there appeared the most diverse forms of life, all the different species.

JESUS That seems to me to be a very beautiful explanation.

RACHEL But the Bible says something else. The Bible says that God created first the plants, then the birds, then the fish, then the cattle. It says that in just seven days God created all the living beings, one after another.

JESUS Well, if you really think about it, drawing a thousand different creatures out of a single seed seems a much greater feat than sowing a thousand seeds, one for each creature. What you're saying proclaims God's glory with even greater force.

RACHEL In case you're not aware, let me tell you that there's a terrible conflict between those who defend the Bible's version of creation and those who defend evolution as taught by Darwin. What do you say? Should we believe faith or science?

JESUS Faith is not contained in any book, Rachel. And neither is the firmament contained in any science. Who could be so arrogant as to think he knows everything?

RACHEL But then what do we go with, creation or evolution?

JESUS Rachel, if I understood you well, wasn't it God who created evolution? Didn't God sow the first seed?

RACHEL There's something else I haven't mentioned yet, something that scandalizes many people. According to Darwin's theory we human beings are also a branch on that immense tree of life.

JESUS And what's scandalous about that?

RACHEL Do you know who are first cousins are, our closest relatives on that tree?

JESUS Tell me who.

RACHEL The monkeys!

JESUS The monkeys?

RACHEL But, … what are you laughing about?

JESUS I find that funny. That really is a good joke on God's part -- so that we don't take on airs, so that we become more humble. We're cousins to the monkeys!

RACHEL For many people that kind of relation is an insult.

JESUS I don't understand why. Isn't it the same God who created us and the monkeys and everything that lives on earth? So? We are all born from God's hands. The truth is, I didn't know what you've just told me, Rachel, but …

RACHEL And now that you know, what do you think of Charles Darwin's theory?

JESUS King Solomon was a great sage, but what that man said contains more wisdom than can be found in Solomon.

RACHEL And you, dear listeners, what do you think? Do you side with Darwin or with the Bible? Or with both of them, as Jesus Christ himself says? We await your calls. This is Rachel Perez for Emisoras Latinas, in Jerusalem.

MUSIC

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INTERVIEW 91: BACKGROUND MATERIAL

Charles Darwin

Charles Darwin (1809-82) was the British biologist who devised and explained the theory of evolution. He presented it to the scientific community in a book titled *The Origin of Species*. His discovery, his intuitions and his explanations brought about revolutionary changes in our understanding of life.

Darwin's main idea is that all living organisms have a common origin and that for eons they have been evolving through a very slow process of "natural selection." This process is affected by the external conditions of the environment, such as the abundance or lack of resources, climate, geological changes, arrival of new species to a place, etc. These conditions keep introducing changes and producing different features in living organisms, and in the course of time the changes are passed on to the offspring.

In 1871 Darwin published his book *The Origin of Man*, in which he also includes human beings in the single, unique process of the evolution of life. Darwin stated that the ancestors of human beings were animals similar to monkeys. This provoked a great religious controversy, which continues up to the present day, as Rachel explains to Jesus.

Darwin's finches

The five-year scientific expedition that Darwin undertook in 1831 on the HMS Beagle put him on the trail of the theory of evolution. Darwin examined the diversity of the fauna and flora in very different places, and he came to understand that geographic distances and diversity of environments created the conditions which produced the variations in species.

He was especially helped by the observations he made on the Galapagos Islands, where he studied the colonies of finches, birds with common characteristics but with notable minor differences, depending on the islands where they lived. He theorized that a single species, the ancestral finch, had "evolved" to produce six new species (cactus finch, ground finch, tree finch, woodpecker finch, mangrove finch, warbler finch), according on the environment to which they had to adapt.

Natural selection

Let us listen to how Darwin himself explains natural selection, the key to the theory of evolution; he writes in the careful, delicate style with which he communicated all his revolutionary findings:

As man is able to produce great results in his domestic plants and animals by the accumulation of individual differences in a certain direction, in the same way natural selection would be able to do so, but much more easily, since it has an incomparably greater amount of time for its work. … Since man is able to produce, and certainly has produced, great results by means of methodical, inadvertent selection, what will natural selection not bring about? … How transient are the desires and efforts of man; how short his time, and consequently how poor will be his accomplishments compared with those that nature has accumulated during entire geological epochs! … It may be said metaphorically that natural selection is daily, and even hourly, carrying out in all the world an examination of even the smallest variations; discarding those that do not work, it preserves and accumulates those that do; it works imperceptibly and quietly wherever and whenever an opportunity to improve an organic being presents itself, in relation to the organic and inorganic conditions of life. We see nothing of these small changes that are in progress until the hand of time has put on them the seal of ages, and even then so imperfect is our vision into the remote geological epochs that the only thing we discern is that today's life forms are not what they were in other times.

Darwin ends his book *The Origin of the Species*, which changed scientific ideas forever, with the following words: *There is grandeur in this view of life, with its several powers, having been originally breathed into a few forms or into one; and that, whilst this planet has gone cycling on according to the fixed law of gravity, from so simple a beginning endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful have been, and are being, evolved.*

An ingenious and revolutionary idea

Despite the great variety of animal species, someone like Aristotle, who philosophized about everything he observed, never saw any possible relationship in that variety. When Europeans came to know the fauna of the New World, many were quite disturbed. How could the animals there be so different from the ones known in the Old World? But nobody reflected on the reasons for the differences. During the Renaissance the discoveries of the first fossils also provoked concern, but nobody then thought in terms of evolution. It was the French scientist Jean Baptiste Lamarck who, some fifty years before Darwin, had the first insights about how the similarities and differences of the species could be explained scientifically through a kind of evolution.

Darwin succeeded in structuring these insights and forming them into a rigorous, coherent theory. Modern-day scientists even now are amazed at his discovery. His fellow Briton, Richard Dawkins, a convinced and enthusiastic evolutionist, states: *Living organisms have existed on earth for more than three billion years without knowing why they existed, until the truth was finally understood by one of them – by a man named Charles Darwin.*

And Dawkins takes delight in writing: *On one planet, and possibly on just one planet in the whole universe, molecules that normally would not produce anything more complicated than a piece of stone joined themselves together into pieces of stone-sized matter, organized in such an amazingly complex form that they are capable of running, jumping, swimming, flying, seeing, hearing, and capturing and eating other animated pieces of complex matter. We know now basically how such a trick was done, but we've only known it since 1859. Before that date everythingl seemed very, very strange. Now, thanks to Darwin, it is simply very strange.*

And he concludes that natural selection, the central concept in the theory of evolution, is *the most revolutionary notion in the history of biology, and I would even entertain the idea of substituting "science" for "biology".*

A colossal scandal

Darwin was a man with profound religious sentiment and solid Christian formation – at one time he even wanted to become a clergyman. He knew that his theory would cause confusion among believers, even though he was convinced that the common origin of all living being was something "ennobling" for all. He recognized the scandal caused by his book *The Origin of Species: I feel that the basic conclusion arrived at in this book, that is, that man is descended from an inferiorly organized form, is for many people highly disagreeable.*

The scandal is logical. In proving our animal origins, Darwin not only put us humans "in our place" but also deduced that there was no "purpose" in the evolutionary process. He stated it thus: *There appears to be no more purpose in the variability of living beings and in the action of natural selection than there is in the direction in which the wind blows.* This idea of chance in evolution contradicted the biblical idea of a linear ordering of all created beings toward the appearance on earth of human beings; it was thus judged contrary to the idea of a divine plan, and it seemed to deny God's providence as the guiding force of the universe and history.

Why such anxiety and rejection?

The astrophysicist Carl Sagan gives a good explanation of the scandal provoked by Darwin with his theory of evolution: *Darwin's supremely democratic perspective connects us with our long-forgotten ancestors and with the multitude of our relatives, the millions of other species with which we share the earth. But the price we have paid has been high, and there are still some who refuse to pay it, for reasons that are very understandable.*

Evolution suggests that if God exists, he likes secondary causes and autonomous processes. God set the universe in motion, established the laws of nature, and then left the scene. Apparently there is no executive working on the job: all the power has been delegated. Evolution suggests that God will not intervene, whether we beg him to or not, to save us from ourselves. Evolution suggests that we are alone and that, if there is a God, that God must be far away. That is enough to explain a large part of the anxiety and the rejection that the theory of evolution has produced. We would like to think that someone is at the helm.

Evolutionary theology

There exists an evolutionary theology, which is rooted in a mystique that rejects dualisms, a mystique which finds different expressions in all religions, spiritualities and civilizations. Such a mystical evolutionary theology is formulated thus: *God is not the initiator of evolution. This would mean that evolution functions outside of God. Evolution is God unfolding himself.* And since a crucial element in evolution is the appearance of life, the evolutionary mystics affirm that the name "Life" befits God: *Life is an appropriate concept for designating that reality we call God, because Life also exceeds our comprehension.*

Creationism vs. evolutionism

Since Darwin revolutionized science with his speaking and writing, he was subject to all kinds of criticism, ridicule and dismissal. Nevertheless, from the start his theory won space in the minds of scientists throughout the world. The theory convinced, impassioned, explained and revealed.

In more recent times “evolutionism” has been challenged by “creationism,” which is based on the story of creation that appears in Genesis. Its defenders insist on the direct creation of every living organism by God, and most especially on the direct creation by God of the human species.

The intellectual battles between the two theories have been constant, as have the legal battles. One of the most famous was the so-called “Monkey Trial”, which took place in Dayton, Ohio (U.S.A.), in 1925. In that trial the science professor John Thomas Scopes was accused of teaching evolution and thus of breaking a law of the southern state of Tennessee that prohibited teaching in the public schools *any theory that negated the story of man’s divine creation as it is taught in the Bible, and that taught instead that man is descended for a lesser order of animals.* Scopes won the trial. This interesting story was made into a movie called “Inherit the Wind” (1960) by director Stanley Kramer.

From creationism to intelligent design

As science developed, evolutionism gained more ground, and creationism became ever more indefensible. In the 1990s, however, biblical fundamentalism also made advances, among both Catholics and Protestants, and the defenders of creationism decided on a new strategy, which is called “intelligent design”. This new form of creationism, which presents itself as a scientific proposal, states that the origin and the evolution of the universe, of life and of human beings are the result of rational actions deliberately implemented by an intelligent agent with predetermined objectives.

The intelligent design movement appeared first in the United States and is strongest there. The growing influence of the evangelical churches, which promote biblical literalism and religious fanaticism, has steadily extended the movement to other countries. In the Catholic Church as well, there have been pronouncements that seem to favor some of the postulates of this quite unscientific theory.

The virtual encyclopedia Wikipedia offers a very complete summary of the differences between the theory of evolution and the ideas behind intelligent design.

The risk of creationism

In addition to the diffusion of the “scientific” proposal of intelligent design, creationism remains alive and well, especially in the United States, and its proponents still seek to communicate it to the younger generations. In the year 2007 only 26% of the U.S. population accepted the theory of evolution, while 65% thought that biblical creationism should be taught in the schools, on the same level as evolution. Belief in creationism or intelligent design has extremely serious political consequences, for only one-third of the people in the U.S. think that the government should take

action to slow down climatic change. They think this way because they believe that all affairs at the planetary level are be left solely in the hands of the God the Creator, the Intelligent Designer.

Evolution: "more than a hypothesis"

After a century of belligerent church activism against the theory of evolution, including censures and anathemas against Catholics who defended it, Pope Pius XII finally, in 1950, issued the encyclical "Humani Generis". Pope John Paul II explained the contents of this encyclical thus:

Taking into account the state of scientific investigations of that epoch and also the requirements specific to theology, the encyclical considered the doctrine of "evolutionism" as a serious hypothesis, just as worthy of profound investigation and reflection as the opposing hypothesis. Pius XII added two conditions of a methodological nature: that this opinion not be adopted as if it were a certain and demonstrated doctrine or as if it were possible to abstract totally from revelation with regard to the questions that this doctrine treats.

At last, on October 23rd, 1996, Pope John Paul II formally announced to the Pontifical Academy of the Sciences that *new knowledge leads us to recognize that the theory of evolution is more than a hypothesis. In fact, it is remarkable how this theory has been gradually imposed on the spirit of the researchers, because of a series of discoveries made in different disciplines. The convergence, in no way sought or provoked, of the results of works undertaken independently of one another constitutes in itself a significant argument in favor of this theory.* On this occasion the Pope declared that creation and evolution could live together without conflict. But he still reserved a space for control: they could live together as long as we continued to believe that only God creates the human soul.

The "heresy" of evolution

The Catholic Church rejected the theory of evolution for a hundred years, and many evangelical churches continue to reject it even today. They do so out of ignorance, as well as out of fundamentalism and a biblical literalism based on arrogance. Indeed, if they were to accept this scientific evidence, they would have to accept that human beings are not the "kings and queens" of nature and that nature does not belong to us, but that we belong to nature. We would have to be more humble, recognizing that we have no right to dominate other beings, since we are part of a highly complex, intricate vital network.

The theory of evolution is heresy for those who read Genesis literally or adopt a philosophy of life that Richard Dawkins so appropriately calls "speciesism". Evolution calls into question the arrogance of our species, it "humbles" us humans and puts us in contact with the earth, with our true animal self, with our animal impulses and instincts. It puts us in our place, keeps us from thinking we are the superior species, endowed with the right to dominate other species for our own benefit.

More and more thinkers, especially women thinkers, are concluding that the centrality given to the human species in the civilization we have constructed (anthropocentrism) and the centrality given to the masculine version of our species in that civilization (androcentrism) are what is carrying human civilization to its destruction.

Not a ladder but a bush with many branches

All the fossils of the genus “Homo” that have been appearing in Africa, the birthplace of humanity, demonstrate the theory of evolution. They also demonstrate that our genealogical tree cannot be represented as a ladder that has its highest rung at our species, “Homo sapiens”. Neither can we imagine it to be a straight tree that culminates in our “chosen species”. The best image for understanding what we are and the place that we occupy on the tree of life is to think of a leafy bush with branches in all directions – we are just one of those branches.

Human evolution was not a rectilinear process, passing through “Homo habilis” to “Homo erectus” and then finally to “Homo sapiens”. Today we know that for more than a million years “Homo habilis” and “Homo erectus” coexisted in separate ecological niches, but did not cross genetically; they had common ancestors some two to three million years previously. As all the scientists insist, “the more we know of the history of evolution, the more complex it becomes.” *The discoveries reveal that human evolution was chaotic, far removed from that heroic procession that we see in some drawings, with an early ancestor evolving into something intermediate, and then finally reaching modern man*. Thus writes Fred Spoor, co-author, along with the famous paleontologist Maeve Leakey, of a study carried out in Kenya in 2007.

Our closest relatives

Among the living beings that inhabit the planet today, our closest relatives are the monkeys, specifically the three great primates (chimpanzees, orangutans, and gorillas). Among these three the nearest to us are the chimpanzees, with whom we share 99.5% of our genetic code. Science has determined that humans and chimps shared a common ancestor some six million years ago; from that time to this our two species have evolved separately to become what we are today. This evolution took place in Africa. Some peoples of western Africa even now preserve in their language a memory of the ancestral relationship. For example, “chimpanzee” is a word in the Congolese dialect that means “a jokester”. The people of that zone have great respect for the chimpanzees. Among the Oubi people it is forbidden to kill them, the Mende people (of Guinea) call them “different people”, and the Baulé people call them “beloved brothers”.

Our first cousins

Western culture and Christian theology, which have been greatly influenced by Hellenistic thought right up to the present, have until recently marked a clear dividing line between human beings and “beasts”, characterizing the latter as lacking in reason and language, the so-called “gift of the gods”.

Ever since Darwin developed his theory of evolution, which shows all forms of life to be related to one another, the science of evolution has taught us to be more humble. Recent evolutionary research has demonstrated that our “first cousins”, the chimpanzees, are so much like us that they behave, feel and think very similarly to the way we do, that they are biologically suited for learning because of their insatiable curiosity, their ability to imitate, their fondness for play, and their prolonged childhood.

It has been shown that they can even talk. Not only do they understand simple, concrete words, but they express concepts. They understand symbols and can articulate complex ideas by means of sign

language with extraordinary ability, very much the way children do. If they are unable to pronounce words which they understand and express with signs, it is only because they lack a sound apparatus like our own, but their brain generates words and phrases, the miracle of language.

We can read more about this in the superb book by Roger Fouts, *Next of Kin: My Conversations with Chimpanzees* (Harper, 1998) and in various works of the British primatologist Jane Goodall, a pioneer in the scientific study of chimps since 1960.

Washoe gives us a lesson in humility

The following beautiful lesson in humility comes from Fouts's long and devoted experience with the chimpanzee Washoe, who died in November, 2007, at the age of 42. Fouts had taught her to speak by means of American Sign Language.

Among the countless memories of Washoe that come to my mind, from the first signs she learned to her many trials as a mother, one especially stands out for its intensity: the moment when Washoe woke up, one morning in 1970, in the colony of chimps of the Oklahoma Institute. She was five years old, and for the first time since her infancy, she found himself face to face with her own kind. She spoke to me and asked: "Who are these black beetles?" Washoe could have hung onto her "human superiority" and ignored or maltreated the other chimps, who were for her strange beings with terrible manners, who could not talk as she could. However, she was able to forgo her cultural arrogance and developed a wonderfully protective feeling toward her fellows. She showed motherly affection for the smallest one and defended those who were weak. I have often wondered what it would be like to wake up one day, as Washoe die, and discover that we are not the superior beings we thought we were.

"The locks to the mysteries"

In this interview Rachel explains to Jesus the mechanism of life and the theory of evolution as taught by Darwin, and Jesus, like a good Jew, responds to her by grasping the mystery "without removing the mysterious" – thus is wisdom characterized in an old Hasidic story.

Hasidism is a religious movement which began in the 17th century and throws new light on the relationship between the human and the divine by drawing on Jewish cultural roots – the same ones that made Jesus wise and humble.

Just as every lock has a unique key that opens it , so every mystery of this world has a corresponding meditation, which penetrates and expounds it. But just as there are thieves for the locks, so there are thieves for the mysteries, and God does not love any less those thieves who pop the locks of the mysteries. That is the explanation given in the story of the Maguid of Mezritsh in "The Best Hasidic Stories" of Baal Shem Tov.

In the interview with Rachel Jesus recognizes Darwin to be the wise "thief" who popped the lock of the mystery of life.

Interview 92
DEBATE WITH THE POPE?

RACHEL: Attention, pay close attention, listeners. We've been advised that at last the interview we have been requesting for many days now is finally confirmed. We are making a direct link at this moment with our colleagues at Vatican Radio and Television, which will be the main transmitter of this historic event!

ANNOUNCER: The debate of the century! Today at twelve noon exactly none less than his Holiness the Pope and Jesus Christ himself will meet face to face and hold a discussion. Some journalists have reported that Christ has returned to earth after two thousand years.

ANNOUNCER: The debate will take place by videoconference. His Holiness the Pope did not agree to go to Jerusalem because of the climate of insecurity that prevails in the Middle East. Jesus Christ said that he has never been to Rome and, besides, he does not have a visa for Italy, so he prefer to speak from his native land. We thank Emisoras Latinas for providing the contact with him.

RACHEL: Well, at least they gave us some credit!

ANNOUNCER: Our satellite signal can be picked up by millions of receivers all around the planet. Giant screens have been set up in the major cities so that the debate can be seen on all the continents, especially in the Christian countries.

JESUS: Rachel, stay here with me. All this apparatus makes me nervous.

RACHEL: Okay, don't worry. I'll tell you when they put us on the air and when you have to speak.

ANNOUNCER: Ladies and gentlemen, in a few moments will begin the must unexpected encounter in all of history. In Jerusalem is Jesus Christ, and in Rome his Holiness, the Supreme Pontiff of the Catholic Church. The represented and the representative, face to face.

JESUS: And what are this fellow and I going to talk about, Rachel?

RACHEL: It's an open agenda. According to certain leaks I've received, the Pope wants to ask you about abortion, condoms, homosexuals, … topics you didn't treat clearly in the gospels.

ANNOUNCER: At the present time His Holiness the Pope is making his entrance into the Sistine Chapel, decked out in a splendid gold-braided chasuble. On his head he is wearing the triple crown that symbolizes his authority. He is carrying a staff, also made of solid gold.

JESUS: That man is my representative, Rachel?

RACHEL: Well, yes, he says he's your vicar on this earth.

ANNOUNCER: The Pope is sitting down on the throne. Above him is the renowned fresco of Michelangelo, which presents Jesus Christ in the Final Judgment, separating the just from the sinners. But on this occasion we have Jesus Christ, live and direct, in a still unidentified location in Jerusalem. In a few moments the moderator of the debate will begin the discussion.

MODERATOR: I remind both of you that you will take turns in presenting your ideas, limiting each answer to three minutes. I believe we are ready to start. The one who'll begin the discussion, for reasons of seniority, will be Jesus Christ.

RACHEL: Now you can speak, Jesus. You can say or ask whatever you want. You have three minutes.

JESUS: I don't think I'll need that much time. I … I only want to ask one question. You say that you represent me. Why do you dress in gold then, and put on a crown, and wear a costume like the Roman emperor's? The emperor thought he was god. Who do you think you are?

MODERATOR: Ahem, … the speaker still has two and a half minutes left.

RACHEL: You can keep speaking, Jesus.

JESUS: Hear me now. If you want to be my disciple, go, sell what you have, those jewels, that palace – sell it all and give it to the poor. And then you will be able to speak in my name. I feel sorry for you, blind man leading other blind people. I feel sorry for you who shut the door of the Kingdom of God – you neither enter yourself nor allow those who fight for justice to enter!

MODERATOR: Ahem, … now we give His Holiness the Pope a chance to respond..

ANNOUNCER: One moment, please…. The signal we are receiving from the Vatican is confused … the Supreme Pontiff has stood up and is leaving. … We don't know exactly what is happening. He's leaving the Sistine Chapel, … even here we could hear the door slamming. We ask pardon of our kind audience and … and we terminate this transmission.

MUSIC

ANNOUNCER: Another God is Possible. Exclusive interviews with Jesus Christ in his second coming to Earth. A production of María and José Ignacio López Vigil, with the support of the Syd Forum and Christian Aid.

INTERVIEW 92: BACKGROUND MATERIAL

The scene of the debate

The Sistine Chapel is one of the most famous artistic treasures of the Vatican. It was built between 1471 and 1484 during the papacy of Sixtus IV, from whom it gets its name. It is the hall where the conclaves for electing the popes and held and other official ceremonies take place, such as the coronation of popes. The frescos of Michelangelo, among them that of the Final Judgment, give the hall a special value. It was natural for the Pope to choose this place for his debate with Jesus of Nazareth.

The characters, the conflict and the outcome

What would happen in a debate between the Pope and Jesus of Nazareth? Would Jesus recognize the Roman Pontiff as the representative of his movement? What would he think of the ostentation of the papacy and the luxury which surrounds the office? Wouldn't he be surprised to see the Pope dressed with so many attributes of royalty and power? Surely Jesus would identify the Vatican pomp with that which he knew surrounded the Roman emperors of his time. Surely he would recognize in the papal vestments some of the ornaments of the high priests who condemned him to death. Such excess of wealth and spectacle no doubt would shock Jesus, and given his passionate radicality, he would repeat one of his most emphatic messages: we must choose between God and money, share our wealth with the poor, and renounce the arrogance of thinking ourselves superior to others.

What would happen with the Pontiff in such a case? Would the Pope recognize in the Galilean peasant the Christ of his dogmas? Would he respect him and listen to him? Would he believe that it was really Jesus of Nazareth scolding and criticizing him? To be sure, anyone who thought himself infallible in questions of Christian faith, who never debated with anyone but simply gave orders and "pontificated", who had so much authority, and who lived surrounded by so many symbols of powers, would not respond at all to the criticism and would leave the hall in a huff.

Interview 93
GOD OR MONEY?

RACHEL Yes, one moment, please, … No sir, here at Emisoras Latinas we respect the freedom of opinion of all our guests, … and even more if the guest is Jesus Christ, … Wow! … I think we've got a big problem.

JESUS What's going on, Rachel?

RACHEL After the debate with the Pope the telephone hasn't stopped ringing. The public, or at least part of the public, has taken strong exception to your words. They say that they will denounce us if we don't stop these broadcasts immediately.

JESUS And what are they so bothered about?

RACHEL They say you've offended the Holy Father.

JESUS Me offending him? But that man is the one who is offending people, especially poor people. How can he speak in my name dressed up like an emperor? I couldn't have spoken more clearly it's impossible to serve two masters, God and money.

RACHEL But be reasonable, Jesus. In the Vatican, in the churches, there are many paintings, sculptures, gems of much value. They're works of art.

JESUS Rachel, in traveling around these days, I have seen many poor men and women, I've seen children who are hungry. They are our greatest works of art, made in the image and likeness of God. All the treasures and artistic objects that those temples hold are not worth as much as just one of them.

RACHEL Yes, but …

JESUS You're a mother, Rachel, right?

RACHEL Yes, I have two children.

JESUS And if you saw your children suffering from hunger, would you dare to put on golden rings and dress up with crowns and luxurious garments?

RACHEL Well, if you put it that way…

JESUS There's really no other way to put it.

RACHEL All right then, but what can they do with all those things they have, sell them?

JESUS They can sell them, give them away, let them do what they like. But there's one truth I will tell you those camels will not pass through the eye of a needle.

RACHEL A call is coming in, … Yes, hello? … Pepe Rodriguez, the researcher? … How nice. … You'd like to offer your opinion about the recent debate with the Pope?

PEPE Yes, it was magnificent. And I'd like let you to know that, besides the social insensitivity that it indicates, all that great wealth that you saw through Vatican television is stolen property.

RACHEL How do you mean stolen? Are you referring to the business of indulgences that we were discussing on a previous program?

PEPE No, I'm referring to the Donation of Constantine.

RACHEL Could you explain yourself better, please?

PEPE Listen, Rachel, and have Jesus hear this as well. Four centuries after the death of that sinister Roman emperor Constantine, the Catholic Church came up with a document that it said was written personally by Constantine.

RACHEL And what did that document say?

PEPE It said that the emperor was entrusting his personal palace to the church of Rome, in the person of Pope Sylvester.

JESUS A palace for a representative of mine?

PEPE He also gave the Pope the imperial insignia and the purple royal robes. That red cape which the Popes wear even today is a souvenir of Constantine.

RACHEL It's hard to believe…

PEPE But it gets better. According to that document, Constantine turned over to the Pope the whole city of Rome, the whole of Italy, and all the western provinces of the empire. That's thousands and thousands of square kilometers, half of Europe.

RACHEL But did Constantine really sign that letter?

PEPE No, the famous Donation of Constantine was a counterfeit document fabricated by another pope, Stephen II. It was in that way that the Roman church accumulated such colossal wealth, and even today it's prospering from the returns of that robbery.

JESUS I can't believe what I'm hearing.

RACHEL Thank you, Pepe Rodriguez. … Whew … Jesus, I'm trying to remain impartial as a journalist, but …

JESUS Well, I'm not! The priests of my time were small-time worms compared with this race of vipers.

RACHEL I think that … that maybe the best thing now is to sign off for today. From Jerusalem, reporting for Emisoras Latinas, this has been Rachel Perez.

MUSIC

ANNOUNCER Another God is Possible. Exclusive interviews with Jesus Christ in his second coming to Earth. A production of María and José Ignacio López Vigil, with the support of the Syd Forum and Christian Aid.

INTERVIEW 93: BACKGROUND MATERIAL

Legend upon legend

The traditional Catholic legend says that Constantine, before the battle which made him emperor of the western empire in the year 312, saw in the sky a cross, which was a symbol of his coming victory, and that experience made him "convert" to Christianity. Another legend relates that Pope Sylvester I had cured Constantine of leprosy after his military victory and that out of gratitude he left all his inheritance to the Roman papacy. Constantine died in 337, after being baptized on his deathbed.

Owners of an empire

Four hundred years after Constantine died, Pope Stephen II made public an imperial decree that had been completely unknown up till that time: the "Donation of Constantine", dated March 30th of the year 315. In that decree the emperor "donates" to the church of Rome a huge extension of the empire's territories, in gratitude to Pope Sylvester "for having cured him of leprosy".

The document was actually a forgery elaborated by Pope Stephen II in order to achieve an alliance with Charlemagne that would help him confront the Lombards, who were threatening the power of the Roman papacy. By that time the Roman empire had already fallen, and different kings were dividing the European territories up among themselves. In such a complex and explosive situation, the fraudulent document made the Pope in Rome owner of practically all of Europe. The forged decree served for centuries to lay the bases for a power that had never before been seen in history, the power of the papacy. found

Donation of power, money, lands, pomp and luxury

The Donation of Constantine reads in part as follows:

I perceived these things, and learned that by the kindness of St. Peter himself [the Pope] I had been entirely restored to health: I, together with all our satraps and the whole senate and the nobles and all the Roman people, who are subject to the glory of our rule, considered it advisable that, as on earth he (Peter) is seen to have been constituted vicar of the Son of God, so the pontiffs, who are the representatives of that same chief of the apostles, should obtain from us and our empire the power of a supremacy greater than the earthly clemency of our imperial serenity is seen to have had conceded to it, and so we choose that same prince of the apostles, or his vicars, to be our constant intercessors with God. And to the extent of our earthly imperial power, we decree that his holy Roman church shall be honored with veneration; and that, more than our empire and earthly throne, the most sacred seat of St. Peter shall be gloriously exalted; and we give to it the imperial power, and dignity of glory, and vigor and honor.

And we ordain and decree that he shall have the supremacy as well over the four chief seats Antioch, Alexandria, Constantinople and Jerusalem, as also over all the churches of God in the whole world. And he who for the time being shall be pontiff of that holy Roman church shall be more exalted than, and chief over, all the priests of the whole world; and, according to his judgment, everything which is to be provided for the service of God or the stability of the faith of the Christians is to be administered. It is indeed just that there the holy law should have the seat of its rule where the founder of holy laws, our Savior, told St. Peter to take the chair of the apostleship; where also, sustaining the cross, he blissfully took the cup of death and appeared as imitator of his Lord and Master; and that there the people should bend their necks at the confession of Christ's name, where their teacher, St. Paul the apostle, extending his neck for Christ, was crowned with martyrdom. There, until the end, let them seek a teacher, where the holy body of the teacher lies; and there, prone and humiliated, let them perform the service of the heavenly king, God our Savior Jesus Christ, where the proud were accustomed to serve under the rule of an earthly king. …

We have also constructed the churches of St. Peter and St. Paul, chiefs of the apostles, which we have enriched with gold and silver; where also, placing their most sacred bodies with great honor, we have constructed their caskets of electrum, against which no force of the elements prevails. And we have placed a cross of purest gold and precious gems on each of their caskets, and fastened them with golden keys. And on these churches for the endowing of divine services we have conferred estates, and have enriched them with different objects; and, through our sacred imperial decrees, we have granted them our gift of land in the East as well as in the West; and even on the northern and southern coast – namely, in Judea, Greece, Asia, Thrace, Africa and Italy and the various islands – under this condition indeed, that all shall be administered by the hand of our most blessed father the pontiff Sylvester and his successors. …

In return for which, to those same holy apostles, my masters, St. Peter and St. Paul; and, through them, also to St. Sylvester, our father, the chief pontiff and universal pope of the city of Rome; and to all the pontiffs his successors, who until the end of the world shall be about to sit in the seat of St. Peter: we concede and, by this present do confer, our imperial Lateran palace, which is preferred to, and ranks above, all the palaces in the whole world; then a diadem, that is, the crown of our head, and at the same time the tiara; and, also, the shoulder band, that is, the collar that usually surrounds our imperial neck; and also the purple mantle, and crimson tunic, and all the imperial raiment; and the same rank as those presiding over the imperial cavalry; conferring also the imperial scepters, and, at

the same time, the spears and standards; also the banners and different imperial ornaments, and all the advantage of our high imperial position, and the glory of our power.

And we decree, as to those most reverend men, the clergy who serve, in different orders, that same holy Roman church, that they shall have the same advantage, distinction, power and excellence by the glory of which our most illustrious senate is adorned; that is, that they shall be made patricians and consuls and shall also be decorated with the other imperial dignities. And even as the imperial soldiery, so, we decree, shall the clergy of the holy Roman church be adorned. And even as the imperial power is adorned by different offices – by the distinction, that is, of chamberlains, and door keepers, and all the guards – so we wish the holy Roman church to be adorned.

And, in order that the pontifical glory may shine forth more fully, we decree this also: that the clergy of this same holy Roman church may use saddle cloths of linen of the whitest color; namely, that their horses may be adorned and so be ridden, and that, as our senate uses shoes with goats' hair, so they may be distinguished by gleaming linen; in order that, as the celestial beings, so the terrestrial may be adorned to the glory of God. Above all things, moreover, we give permission to that same most holy one, our father Sylvester, bishop of the city of Rome and pope, and to all the most blessed pontiffs who shall come after him and succeed him in all future times – for the honor and glory of Jesus Christ our Lord – to receive into that great Catholic and apostolic church of God, even into the number of the monastic clergy, any one from our senate, who, in free choice, of his own accord, may wish to become a cleric; no one at all presuming thereby to act in a haughty manner.

We also decree that this same venerable one, our father Sylvester, the supreme pontiff, and all the pontiffs his successors, might use and bear upon their heads – to the Praise of God and for the honor of St. Peter – the diadem, that is, the crown which we have granted him from our own head, of purest gold and precious gems. But he, the most holy pope, did not at all allow that crown of gold to be used over the clerical crown which he wears to the glory of St. Peter; but we placed upon his most holy head, with our own hands, a tiara of gleaming splendor representing the glorious resurrection of our Lord. And, holding the bridle of his horse, out of reverence for St. Peter we performed for him the duty of groom; decreeing that all the pontiffs his successors, and they alone, may use that tiara in processions.

In imitation of our own power, in order that for that cause the supreme pontificate may not deteriorate, but may rather be adorned with power and glory even more than is the dignity of an earthly rule: behold, we give over to the oft-mentioned most blessed pontiff, our father Sylvester, the universal pope, as well our palace, as has been said, as also the city of Rome and all the provinces, districts and cities of Italy or of the western regions; and we relinquish them, by our inviolable gift, to the power and sway of himself or the pontiffs his successors. So we do decree, by this our godlike charter and imperial constitution, that it shall be (so) arranged; and do concede that they (the palaces, provinces etc.) shall lawfully remain with the holy Roman church.

Wherefore we have perceived it to be fitting that our empire and the power of our kingdom should be transferred and changed to the regions of the East; and that, in the province of Byzantium, in a most fitting place, a city should be built in our name; and that our empire should there be established. For, where the supremacy of priests and the head of the Christian religion has been established by a heavenly ruler, it is not just that there an earthly ruler should have jurisdiction.

We decree, moreover, that all these things which, through this our imperial charter and through other godlike commands, we have established and confirmed, shall remain uninjured and unshaken until the end of the world. Wherefore, before the living God, who commanded us to reign, and in the face of his terrible judgment, we conjure, through this our imperial decree, all the emperors our successors, and all our nobles, the satraps also and the most glorious senate, and all the people in the whole world now and in all times previously subject to our rule: that no one of them in any way allow himself to oppose or disregard or in any way seize these things which, by our imperial sanction, have been conceded to the holy Roman church and to all its pontiffs. If anyone, moreover – which we do not believe – prove a scorner or despiser in this matter, he shall be subject and bound over to eternal damnation; and shall feel that the holy chiefs of the apostles of God, Peter and Paul, will be opposed to him in the present and in the future life. And, being burned in the nethermost hell, he shall perish with the devil and all the impious.

Without repentance

The gigantic fraud which was the Donation of Constantine allowed the Catholic Church to accumulate a huge patrimony from which it lives even today. For centuries this forgery was used by the Popes to install and remove civil authorities, to annex territories, and to influence the politics of Europe.

Even though the document was denounced as a forgery from the year 1001 on, it was not until 1440 that Laurenzio Valla, a humanistic educator and philosopher, and also a pontifical secretary, revealed by means of very detailed linguistic analysis, that it really was a counterfeit document. His findings were not published until 1519, after Luther had already begun to combat papal autocracy in Germany.

The Vatican did not acknowledge the fraud until the 19th century, at which time it was under pressure from the political changes taking place throughout the world. Even so, the Popes have never expressed any repentance for this scam, and even less have they demonstrated any willingness to make any compensation for what had been stolen or extorted for centuries by means of the “Donation of Constantine”.

Vatican wealth

After accumulating great properties and wealth and imposing its power and its laws for centuries in all of Europe, the Roman papacy lost a large part of its possessions, so that by the 19th century it was “reduced” to what is today the Vatican, a city-state of less than one-half square kilometer, with a thousand inhabitants; it is the sovereign state with the smallest territory and the smallest population in the world. The Basilica and Plaza of Saint Peter occupy 20% of its territory.

Despite its territorial losses, the Vatican is a very wealthy state, but its properties, its financial holdings, and its businesses are always kept secret. The patrimony of the Vatican has been calculated at between one billion and 12 billion euros. It is claimed that a third of the buildings of Rome are still owned by the Vatican and that the golden treasures stored away in this mini-state are incredible, among the greatest in the world. There is much speculation about the present-day wealth of the Vatican. Two thousand years of history can provide us information, if not about the wealth itself, about how so much wealth got accumulated.

At the website www.freie-christen.com/riqueza_de_la_iglesia.html may be found a document (in Spanish) called “The wealth of the Church is money stained with blood.” It contains much useful information and a good bibliography on this topic. The table of contents offers a list of topics to help with further research: “The wealth of the Vatican: gold, stocks and bonds, consortiums, lands, cities, real estate. Super-rich through: slavery, servitude, blessings and titles, selling pardon, Inquisition and witch-burning, forgery of documents, fraudulent inheritances, tithes, sale of posts, murders, side incomes, prostitution, subventions from swindling the people.”

Power and glory: some estimates

In 1984 British researcher David Yallop revealed in his book *In God’s Name* the circumstances surrounding the murder of Pope John Paul I in October, 1978, after he had decided to clean up the Vatican’s financial world, which by that time was involved in all kinds of criminal activities and fraudulent operations. In 2007 Yallop published another book, *The Power and the Glory,* with the aim of unveiling the personality of the successor of John Paul I, the polish Pope Karol Kojtyla, and the way he had used pontifical power. Yallop gives specific details concerning Wojtyla’s complicity with the sordid world of Vatican finances. Pope John Paul II ignored the measures his predecessor had proposed and never dismissed the persons mainly responsible for the financial scandals.

In the course of this book Yallop makes several estimates of the size of Vatican wealth, as for example when John Paul II became pope: *In 1979 the true financial position of the Holy See was to be found dispersed among several institutions. There was the Administration of the Patrimony of the Holy See, with its Ordinary and Extraordinary Sections. The Ordinary Section kept the funds of the different congregations, tribunals, and offices. Specifically, it possessed a large part of the papacy’s real estate, which in Rome alone amounted to more than 5,000 rented apartments. In 1979 the gross assets of this section were more than one billion dollars. The Extraordinary Section, the Vatican’s other bank, was as active in its daily stock market speculations as was the Institute of Religious Works, controlled by Marcinkus. It specialized in the foreign-exchange market and worked very closely with Crédit Suisse and the Société des Banques Suisses. The Vatican Bank, managed by Marcinkus, had gross assets greater than one billion dollars. Its annual profits in 1979 were over 120 million dollars, 85% of which went directly to the Pope to be used as he thought best. There is one more figure which helps give an idea of the Church’s wealth: at the end of 1979 the Catholic Church in Germany alone received two billion dollars from the state as part of the annual ecclesiastical tax.*

In the chapters titled “The Vatican Inc., 1” and “The Vatican Inc., 2” of his book, Yallop offers much information about the financial scandals of the Vatican Bank and the Ambrosian Bank, a history that includes suicides, murders, judicial prosecutions, frauds, extortions, calumnies, swindles, and a dense tangle of corruption, all taking place during the pontificate of John Paul II.

Such wealth is a myth?

No transparent information concerning the Vatican’s wealth is available, and the church’s hierarchical authorities insist that such wealth does not exist. Their refusal to acknowledge the wealth extends also to a refusal to debate about the matter.

For example, the web page of the official Catholic television network EWTN gives the following evasive answer to the question of a worried Catholic who asks, “How do I defend my faith when they attack the Vatican for its wealth?”

Answer: *Non-Catholics are the ones who are least able to talk about this, since their churches are mostly private family businesses that manage millions of dollars. Besides that, they are not known to sponsor any charitable works for the benefit of anybody. Vatican wealth is one of the myths most promulgated by the Apostasy.*

According to the magazine “National Geographic”, in its special edition “Inside the Vatican” (page 67), “Fortune Magazine” examined Vatican finances (figuring to place the Pope among the world’s richest people) and found to its surprise that Vatican had finances of only 500 million dollars a year to govern the whole church and its institutions. Consider the following: the educational system of Miami-Dade County has an annual budget of five billion dollars for less then one million students; the Protestant bishop T. D. Jackes lives, according to “Ebony” magazine, in a mansion worth 1.7 million dollars and is one of the richest Black entrepreneurs in the U.S.; the Pope’s charities collect around 80 million dollars annually in the whole universal church; and Protestant corporations like TBN (a television channel belonging to pastors named Crouch) collect in a one-week marathon in the U.S. more than 800 million dollars; Benny Hinn, a Protestant pastor, lives in a house worth more than a million dollars and wears a Rolex watch worth 70 thousand dollars. Considering all this, we ask: where is the wealth of the Church of a Pope who always dresses in white and never enjoys luxuries?

The Vatican is wealthy in works of arts, works that are the patrimony of humanity and have been preserved for centuries by the Church. It is rich in cultic objects that are for God’s glory, just as the cultic objects of Israel were made of precious metals, not of dollars! Furthermore, how many charitable works does the Church maintain throughout the world? Orphanages, leprosariums, schools, hospitals, etc. They can’t be numbered. A Protestant complained to my sister about the Vatican’s wealth, and she told him: “The Vatican’s riches are visible because they are on the altars for God’s glory; your church’s riches cannot be seen because they are in the bank account of your pastor!” Don’t you think this is a good argument?

No comment.

Unable to speak against capitalism

The extreme growth in wealth, which the church of Rome legalized and legitimized with the Donation of Constantine, instilled in that institution the vices of power that are always linked to money, and they remain so until our own days of globalized capitalism. The Spanish theologian José María Díez-Alegría, draws the following conclusion:

Jesus said, “You cannot serve two masters, you cannot serve God and money.” But Christian churches, especially the Roman Catholic, have kept these words of Jesus in the freezer. In the development of the Christian churches one factor prevents them from breaking free of their collusion with the structures of modern capitalism: their high degree of institutionalization. Although interiorly removed from the system, which makes the poor ever poorer, these churches are linked to the system on the institutional plane and therefore have to keep their mouths shut. In order to be in a

position to make their message heard, they have to stop speaking! This is the vicious circle that characterizes their situation.

Interview 94
BLACK LEGEND?

JESUS: Hold on a second, Rachel. I just want to talk with this woman who's selling some good leather sandals. Mine are really worn out from so much traveling up and down these days.

RACHEL: Leave that for another time, Jesus. We've just received an angry protest from a Catholic channel. It's coming from a program called "Black Legends"

JESUS: Black Legends?

RACHEL: Yes, it's a racist term, but …

JESUS: Does it have something to do with my being dark-skinned?

RACHEL: No, no, rather … it's better if I explain it to you later.

JESUS: And what are those Catholics saying?

RACHEL: That everything we've broadcast in the last few programs – and in the earlier ones also – is untruthful and scurrilous, that it's a calumny coming from the church's enemies. … Are we still on the air? Yes, hello?

WOMAN: But how is it possible that that charlatan, who makes himself pass for Jesus Christ, is still speaking on your network?

RACHEL: Well, ma'am, …

WOMAN: And you, miss reporter, how much are they paying you, huh? And the ones who are writing those programs, how much are they getting?

RACHEL: What's happening is that …

WOMAN: You're just bitter against the church. We have already found out who you are: you're the same ones who wrote that trash called "A Certain Jesus". But you can be sure of one thing: you won't get away with this! (HANGS UP)

RACHEL: We can see how very "Christian" this woman caller is. We have another call, … Yes, hello?

PRIEST: This is a Catholic priest speaking. I am aware of and agree with many of the things that you have been saying and criticizing in your programs. But your comments seem to me inopportune. Why are you giving so much publicity to all this? What are you trying to

do, defame the church? Are you really helping the people's faith? Are you offering a constructive criticism?

JESUS: Tell him that there is a time for planting and another time for rooting up.

PRIEST: So the church is sinful? We already knew that. But it is also holy. It is a "chaste prostitute". So the church has committed errors? Yes, of course, what institution doesn't commit them? But you should wash your dirty laundry at home.

JESUS: Tell him that if it's dirty, it's to be washed where everybody can see it. What was kept in darkness must now be spoken in the light of day, because only the truth with make us free.

PRIEST: And be assured that I will pray for you, that God forgives you -- and forgives that Jesus Christ also.

JESUS: So be it.

RACHEL: We have another call. But, Jesus, please answer this one yourself. My ears are already burning.

GRANDMOTHER: Good day. I would like to speak with Jesus Christ …

JESUS: Well, you're speaking with him now.

GRANDMOTHER: You are Jesus Christ?

JESUS: And you sound like you must be well along in years. Is that the case?

RACHEL: I'm 87 years old, my son, and all my bones are aching.

JESUS: You talk like my grandma Anna. May she rest in peace.

GRANDMOTHER: I'm not calling to offer any insults, Jesus, but just to weep.

JESUS: And why do you want to weep, grandma?

GRANDMOTHER: I have listened to you, lad, and … I think you're right … What you're saying is the pure and simple truth. … But you haven't given me peace; rather a sword has passed through my heart.

JESUS: Like the one that pierced my mother's heart when I went to the Jordan and began to preach about the Kingdom of God.

GRANDMOTHER: I was living peacefully with my rosary and my saints and my candles, … And now, listening to you, I don't know what to think…

JESUS: Thinking is always painful.

GRANDMOTHER: And what about my faith? What do I have left of my faith after learning these things?

JESUS: You still have love left, granny. And hope. God will not fail you, as he did not fail me. Let me tell you the truth: when you finally rest, you will be with me in paradise.

RACHEL: We need to cut short our broadcast, Jesus. Goodbye, dear granny. They're after us, Jesus. The Israeli police are claiming that you're a threat to their national security.

JESUS: Then let's shake the dust off our sandals, Rachel. Jerusalem is the place where they kill the prophets. I can tell you that from experience. It's better if we go to my land, Galilee. There we can keep talking for the little time I have left.

RACHEL: What do you mean? Are you going some place?

JESUS: Quick, Rachel. It's already time.

RACHEL: Well, I'm leaving too … the airwaves, that is. Over and out. This is Rachel Perez, Emisoras Latinas, Jerusalem.

MUSIC

ANNOUNCER: Another God is Possible. Exclusive interviews with Jesus Christ in his second coming to Earth. A production of María and José Ignacio López Vigil, with the support of the Syd Forum and Christian Aid.

INTERVIEW 94: BACKGROUND MATERIAL

The authors of "A Certain Jesus"

Quite right was the listener who discovered the identity of the persons who are behind Emisoras Latinas and are responsible for this coverage of Rachel Perez's interviews with Jesus Christ on his second coming to earth. They are the same persons who, beginning in 1980, gave a face and a voice to "A Certain Jesus".

That first theological and pastoral effort sought to present the historical Jesus in his Palestinian setting, and now we have attempted to bring to our microphones the historical Jesus, so that he could address many of the issues he did not speak about in his own time and could also call into question many of the dogmas which those claiming to represent him have proposed in the name of the Christ of faith.

With the series called “A Certain Jesus” we wanted to give life and color to those short gospel stories that are often bare of detail. We wanted to present Jesus as a real, down-to-earth man, passionate about justice, a defender of human dignity, bold in his religious ideas, a visionary with a countercultural project. We wanted to take the Christology of the great theologians of Latin America and give it a dramatic setting, complete with the colors, the smells, the sayings and wisecracks, the laughs and moans, the psychological complexities, the comedy and tragedy of Jesus’ time. We did so while recalling the teaching of the great Protestant theologian, Joachim Jeremias: *There is no better theology than narration.* We wanted to make Palestine tangible and put flesh on the images of liberation theology, freeing Jesus of the centuries of solemnity which have only put distance between him and those with whom he always was.

We wrote that radio series in 1977, we recorded it in 1979, and by the end of 1980 the cassettes began to make the rounds of all Latin America. It would be hard to calculate how many people have heard the series, which in 1982 was published in book form and later translated into other languages. We have no idea how many have read the book, but there are many. Since the year 2004 we have had all the texts and the audio recordings placed on the Internet at the website: www.untaljesus.net. Every day we receive news of adventurous Internet explorers discovering our website. Thirty years after we produced that work, there are still new generations searching for that dark-skinned Jesus of Nazareth who laughs, who learns, who doubts, who doesn’t want to die. They want to find the historical Jesus, the way that leads us to the *other God.*

Nowadays we often hear the slogan, *Another world is possible.* But another world will never be possible unless *another God is possible.* When we wrote “A Certain Jesus” we wanted to change people’s ideas about God, since that was what Jesus wanted to do also. In our Christian culture that means first changing the artificial and heretical ideas that most Christians have of Jesus. Such ideas derive from a catechesis that is devoid of historical information and based rather on incomprehensible dogmas and a negative image of God.

When we produced “A Certain Jesus” we were accused of being crude unbelievers; people said we “hated God” and were promoting pornography. Some people also claimed, as did one caller in this program, that what we were doing was not “constructive”. Almost all the episcopal conferences of Latin America prohibited the programs from being used on their radio stations and in group meetings, even though not one of the inquisitors at that time deigned to hear a single chapter of the series, much less to dialogue with the authors. Later on the Spanish hierarchy condemned the first edition of the book, but, since we were not church functionaries, they could not prohibit us from teaching or censor what we were writing.

Even as the church authorities were censoring “A Certain Jesus” in 1981, the series was spreading: little by little, like mustard seeds sprouting up, first the cassettes, then the books were being distributed, copied, and passed from hand to hand. They were being played on the radio and discussed in Christian communities. Now we have made the scripts and the audio recordings available on the worldwide web – all the rights shared – so that they can continue to enable people to discover a new face of Jesus of Nazareth, swarthy and smiling – and human, most definitely human.

Now we have called again upon the dark-skinned Jesus of Nazareth and have asked him to return to our world. We have sought to interview him through the microphones of our experienced journalist

Rachel Perez, special correspondent of Emisoras Latinas, so that the same “Jesus of history” may speak to us about the “Christ of faith”. We want him to expose those who for nearly two thousand years have claimed to represent him, but who have really obscured his message of justice and equality. And we want him to give hope to the many grannies like the one who called our program today, to the many orphans and widows, the many women, the many poor people, and the many youths who are struggling for “another world” and searching for the other face of God.

Interview 95
WHICH RELIGION DID JESUS FOUND?

RACHEL For reasons of security and by the express desire of our guest, Jesus Christ, who has told us that in a few days from now he will bring to an end his second coming to earth, we have returned to Galilee. However, we decline to identify the location of our mobile unit.

JESUS Yes, Rachel, it soon will be time for me to leave.

RACHEL We've already treated a great many subjects, and your declarations have been clear and audacious. Still, the audience of Emisoras Latinas claims that they now have more questions than answers.

JESUS That would be a good crop, an abundant harvest. When people asks questions, that means they are searching.

RACHEL They say that all religions seek after God.

JESUS Religions help, but just for a time. Afterwards you have to go beyond religion.

RACHEL You are considered the founder of a religion, the Christian religion, which dominates the western world.

JESUS I didn't found anything, Rachel, certainly nothing that would dominate. I wanted to serve. I searched for God on the basis of the religion of my parents, the Jewish religion.

RACHEL And what did you find?

JESUS The Temple, the priests, the law of the Sabbath, fasts, strings of prayers, Pharisees thinking they were first, rites, sacrifices, blood, …

RACHEL It was all negative?

JESUS No, I also found the prophets who spoke with great passion about justice and took the side of the widows and orphans. Following their example, I began to proclaim the Kingdom of God.

RACHEL And your movement came out of that?

JESUS Yes. We used to say God does not want sacrifices, but love. We said neither in this temple or in any other. We said the last will be first. In our movement the people found a way, a truth, a life.

RACHEL So you founded another religion, the Christian religion, in which you are the way and the truth.

JESUS No, Rachel, I repeat again that I didn't found any religion. I learned that to find God you have to go beyond any religion.

RACHEL And when we reach "beyond" the religions, where do we find God?

JESUS Where he has always been in the streets, among the people, in life, in celebration, in compassion, in justice, in love… Even in the lilies of the field and the birds of the air. When there is no longer anything sacred, then everything begins to be sacred.

RACHEL Jesus, today on the planet earth there are more than 6 billion people living, and at least two billion see you as the one Sent by God. What is more, they adore you as God.

JESUS How many did you say? Two out of six billion? At least they're not a majority!

RACHEL What do you say to them, the Christians, the people who place their faith in you and your words?

JESUS They should search for God as I searched for him. Whoever searches finds, and whoever knocks will have the door opened. I am not the house; I was only the door. Let them enter and leave, freely. And let them go further, further than I went.

RACHEL And what would you say to those billions of people who are not Christians, who believe in other religions or in none at all?

JESUS The same thing, Rachel, because the house of God is open to all men and women without distinction. It has many doors, and it has plenty of space. A cool breeze runs through it, just like here in my homeland, this Galilee of the Gentiles.

RACHEL From an undisclosed location in Galilee, in the north of Palestine, this is Rachel Perez reporting for Emisoras Latinas.

MUSIC

ANNOUNCER Another God is Possible. Exclusive interviews with Jesus Christ in his second coming to Earth. A production of María and José Ignacio López Vigil, with the support of the Syd Forum and Christian Aid.

INTERVIEW 95: BACKGROUND MATERIAL

Religion: unite, join

Religion comes from the Latin word “religare”, which means to join things that are separated, to unite them together. Religion should serve only to join us to the world, to what exists and lives in the world, so that we can build a world that is united and at peace. Religion should serve to help us overcome conflicts and contradictions and to understand that we cannot survive as lone individuals. However, religions have generally acted in the opposite direction: they have disunited people, they have provoked rivalries and conflicts, they have created tensions and divisions, they have established useless borders and antagonisms.

Religions seek to respond to the spiritual needs of human beings. Spirituality is a human reality that is much deeper and more vital than religion. Often the two concepts, religion and spirituality, are confused, and their expressions overlap. As the consciousness of humankind evolves, however, the need to differentiate between religion and spirituality becomes clearer.

Theologian Ivone Gebara laments: *Religions have been transformed into divisions, so much so that perhaps we should not ask: “What is your religion?” but “What is your division?”* And another Brazilian theologian, Leonardo Boff, declares: *Religions engender wars, spiritualities promote peace.*

Religions in the world

There presently exist thousands of living religions in the world. In terms of having the largest number of members, the most important religions are Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism and the traditional Chinese religions, Taoism and Confucianism. The two religions with the most members and with a “universal” vocation are Christianity and Islam. Judaism is considered one of the great world religions because of its historical relevance, but in the world today only 13 million persons belong to this religion. The globalized mass media and the massive movements of migrants and tourists are contributing to an unusual “mixture” of elements from the different religions, resulting in notable forms of religious syncretism.

Is it possible to change religion?

It is very difficult to change religion. It is like wanting to change the native tongue in which we learned to think, to speak, to dream, to communicate. We can learn other languages and express ourselves in them, and that enriches our own language, but feeling and thinking in a foreign language is practically impossible. It would be like living in exile. A Christian can delve into Buddhism, and a Buddhist into Christianity, and both religious cultures are enriched by that. Someone who is born into Judaism can learn about Islam, and vice versa. And of course there are movements from one religion to another, but are they lasting and authentic? The stamp of the religious culture in which we are born marks us for the whole of our life.

Religion is like love

The Frenchman Jean Bottero, a specialist in the myths and rites of the ancient world, knows well “the history of God” in the Bible and in the history of religions. In his book *The Most Beautiful History of God* (Anagrama, 1989) he states:

I compare religion with love. Just as love, by its definition, its finality, its exercise, creates for itself its own sphere, in which it is always recognized, so does religion. Religion has been studied as a conjoining factor, that is, not so much as an individual sentiment as a social pressure on individuals. And that is precisely the first and essential reality of religion. It is true that few persons have completely authentic religious sentiments, but are they any fewer than the people who have completely and authentically been in love?

Religion is consolation

Religion is the opium of the people is perhaps one of the best-known statements of Karl Marx. To understand this opinion better, we should recall that, when Marx used this metaphor, opium was the most potent and commonly used pain-reliever known. The sense of the metaphor, therefore, is not that religion is a form of alienation or a hallucinogenic drug to help people escape from reality, as we understand the effects of drugs today. Rather, Marx understood religion as a consolation for people in the face of suffering that seemed to be inevitable and inescapable.

Spanish philosopher Fernado Savater states: *It seems to me that religion is a special kind of literary genre, like philosophy, and combating it as one more plague without attending to the longings that it expresses is impoverishing not only for the imagination, but even for human reason. I fear that those who use the Bible to refute Darwin are as credulous as those who take for granted that a sufficient dosage of neuroscience will dissipate every theological fog. What is more, I have lived long enough not to want to deprive anybody of whatever consolation they might find in the face of pain and the flight of time, even if I do not share it.*

Religion is like the moon

Willigis Jäger, a monk and master of Zen Buddhism, offers the following metaphor:

Religion may be compared to the moon, which illuminates the earth at night by receiving its light from the sun. When the moon is positioned between the sun and the earth, a solar eclipse occurs. Something similar happens with religion. The sun is the divine; it illuminates the religions so that they shed light on the people in their path. But if religion attributes too much importance to itself, putting itself between God and the people, then it will block out God: an eclipse of God will occur. We find this tendency in all religions.

Religion is like a rope

German theologian Eugen Drewermann uses another metaphor:

Most human being hold onto religion as the person who is drowning holds onto the rope that is thrown to him. He seizes onto it with all his strength. The rope must be strong enough. It is the truth. If the rope ever breaks, an abyss opens below. For that reason it is my own religion, and no other one, that matters to me – it is the true one. … Everything that provides life and security depends on the rope; it must be the truth. Sometimes, though, with the help of this rope people reach land. They then take it easy and let go of the rope, because they now have solid earth under their feet. And they do so without being completely conscious of the fact that it is the earth that is

providing them security. The true religion consists precisely in that: the hand of God that holds us up, and not the rope that we hold onto.

The rope, the religion, is only a tool, a means. The true religion is only a kind of confidence we can't find words to define. Atheism takes the rope away and tells people: "When are you going to stop pretending you're drowning? The earth is under your feet, firm and safe, but you keep holding on to your trauma. There was a time when you thought you were going to fall into the depths and drown, but that was the case a long time ago. In those days you were miserable children and needed security, and that need you had for security was filled by your religion." … Buddha expressed it very beautifully when he said, "My religion, my teaching is simply a boat for crossing the river. Once they arrive on the other shore, people aren't going to think of taking the boat and carrying it on their heads. Rather, they leave it there and walk freely by themselves."

Jesus turned religion "upside down"

In the presentation he gave at the Andalusian Theology Week (Malaga, November 2006), Spanish theologian Juan Luis Herrero del Pozo stated:

For Jesus, the definitive icon of the ineffable God is the neighbor. When someone seriously supports his neighbor, he is accepting God, even if he denies such a concept. All of this means turning traditional religion "upside down". In our day and age Jesus would be condemned as a secularist, a relativist, a reductionist, a modernist. Without a doubt, Jesus of Nazareth was the first significant descralizer of the cosmos and of history.

Religion killed Jesus

French Catholic theologian Joseph Moingt, author of the book *The Man Who Comes from God* (Cerf, 1993), states:

Religion tends always to put itself in the place of God, to oblige people to pass through it to find God. Many people believe that God is found only in the cult or in religious ceremonies. Religion is then identified with the religious obligations and traditions by which people think they please God and have access to him.

Jesus broke with this conception of religion. He was not the only one who attacked the religion of his people. The scandal he caused came from his breaking and disregarding the religious supports that people usually confided in. His freedom in speaking about God and searching for him destabilized the religious institutions. He undermined religious practices that were too assured of themselves, and he changed the course of the received and accepted religious traditions. For that reason they killed him. Religion killed Jesus. In the trial and death of Jesus I see God exiting from religion and entering into the world of humans. This is the good news: God leaves the precinct of the sacred where he had been shut up. God frees us from the weight of religion and the sacred, with all the terrors and all the servitudes they imposed on people.

No religion, all religions

Jesus did not found any religion. He was brought up in the religion of his people, but he experienced and proclaimed a God who would not fit within the rites, the laws, and the beliefs of the religion he was familiar with, nor of any other. There are many people who, recognizing the spiritual values that exist in all the great religions, think that Christianity will ultimately be able to assimilate and adopt the message of Jesus and understand his spirituality only if it learns from those other religions: if it learns from Judaism what the Jewish Jesus thought about his people's tradition and what he wanted to change in that tradition, only if learns from Buddhism the mystical way for finding oneself, and only if it learns from Islam the simplicity of faith and not the heap of laws that Christian hierarchs arrogantly impose on the people.

Interview 96
THE AWAITED MESSIAH?

RACHEL This is Emisoras Latinas, broadcasting from an undisclosed location in a splendid valley of Galilee. We are bringing you the final interviews with Jesus Christ in this, his second coming to earth.

JESUS Shalim, Rachel!

RACHEL Shalim? But you've always greeted me with "Shalom".

JESUS We used to say "Shalim" in my time. It's the Aramaic. People say "Shalom" now, but that's Hebrew. It's the same thing I'm wishing you peace.

RACHEL Well, say it however you wish, because peace is what is most needed in this world. You must know that by now. The three religions that profess belief in the one true God have spawned a history of violence among human beings. I'm referring to Judaism, the religion of your ancestors; to Christianity, the religion you founded; and to Islam, the religion preached by Muhammad centuries after you lived.

JESUS I must insist with you, Rachel I never founded any religion.

RACHEL Well, then they founded it without your permission. Because there it is, and it's making a lot of noise.

JESUS And by what name do they call on God in that Christian religion?

RACHEL By what name? By your name Jesus Christ. That's the reason why I've been calling you that, Jesus Christ, in all these interviews. Aren't you the Christ? And isn't the Christ the messiah, the liberator?

JESUS Listen, Rachel. For a long time my people awaited an anointed one, a messiah, somebody who would be a leader and make things happen in this world. They wanted him to break the yoke of the tyrants and to bring justice for the poor. At first, they imagined him coming on a horse, like a great warrior. Later on they saw him as a suffering servant. And then …

RACHEL And then you arrived.

JESUS No, a lot of others arrived. Before me there were many who were waging the battle. From Moses down to the Maccabees, countless people gave their lives for the liberation of our people. Women too – Miriam, Judith, Esther … There were so many prophets who announced a new world.

RACHEL And then, you arrived.

JESUS What happened then is that some people gradually discovered that the Christ, the messiah so long awaited, was perhaps not one person, but many persons, a great many.

RACHEL A collective messiah?

JESUS Yes, the people themselves – a people who walks in darkness and sees a great light. That light is their own face reflected in the face of God.

RACHEL I have to confess … I don't understood you.

JESUS The thing is, the messiah didn't come, as some think; nor will he come, as other hope. The messiah is always present. Wherever the Spirit of God blows, there is the messiah. Where two or three struggle together for justice, there the messiah is struggling.

RACHEL But then you…

JESUS Listen, Rachel, once when I was in Nazareth the rabbi read from the book of the prophet Ezekiel. The prophet felt sad and overwhelmed by the misery in which his people were living. Then God took him to a field full of bones and told him I will blow on these dry bones, and they will have life. And the bones gradually were covered with flesh and blood. They joined together, and God's spirit entered into them, and they came back to life. It was a very numerous people, a countless multitude, like the grains of sand on a beach, like the stars in the heaven. I always liked that story.

RACHEL And that people was the messiah?

JESUS That's the way I understood it. The messiah, the Christ – it's the poor people when they stand up strong, it's the women when they lift up their heads – they are like a great body that rises up and stands straight.

RACHEL But then, what about you?

JESUS What do you mean, what about me?

RACHEL Are you the messiah, or the Christ, or …?

JESUS Yes, I am, and so are you and all the men and women who struggle.

RACHEL So, Jesus Christ, …

JESUS I prefer to be called just Jesus.

RACHEL Well, that's what we'll call you in the next interviews, which will be the last in our series, which is giving special coverage to your second coming. From someplace in Galilee, this is Rachel Perez reporting for all of you who are tuned in to Emisoras Latinas.

MUSIC

ANNOUNCER Another God is Possible. Exclusive interviews with Jesus Christ in his second coming to Earth. A production of María and José Ignacio López Vigil, with the support of the Syd Forum and Christian Aid.

INTERVIEW 96: BACKGROUND MATERIAL

Waiting for the messiah

The word "messiah" is a Hebrew word that means "anointed". In biblical tradition the king was anointed by a prophet who poured oil on his head, and that anointing made him legitimate before the people. The first anointed king in the history of the people of Israel was Saul, and after him came David and Solomon. Thus the basic meaning of the word "messiah" is a political one.

From around the 6th century before Jesus, after the Babylonian exile, the people of Israel began to nourish great hopes for the arrival of a liberating messiah. In the time of Jesus the expectation of a messiah was a frequent topic of people's conversations. Christianity recognized the Jewish Jesus as the messiah who had been announced and long awaited, and for that reason he was called Jesus "Christ", which is the Greek word for the Hebrew "messiah", that is, "anointed".

Judaism expected that the messiah would be an individual person, but it also thought in terms of a collective messiah. There was also expectation of a "messianic era", and people talked about "messianic events." The prophets, especially Isaiah, often prophesied about the "messianic age."

The expectation of the messiah's arrival exercised a constant influence on the history of Judaism. In the darker periods of its history, the people of Israel always found consolation and hope in the promise of an anointed one who would come to free them. Over the centuries, this belief has given rise to the appearance of many false messiahs. One of the most famous was Sabbatai Zevi, who in the 16th century attracted a following of Jews from all over Europe. At the end, he was forced to convert to Islam. In our own time there have been rabbis who viewed the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948 as a messianic event.

The messianic proletariat

Edgar Morin is a French philosopher, anthropologist and sociologist, who explains the great influence exercised on Jewish culture by the idea of the messiah as liberator, and also by the idea of the collective messiah:

The idea of the chosen people is fundamental for the Jewish religion, just as the idea of a saving messiah is. In the profane thought of the Jewish Marx, the "chosen" or the "anointed" one is the

proletariat, and its messianic mission is to save humankind: it is the proletarian class that will save humanity. The notion of the messiah, which is the point of union between the Jewish world and the Christian world, reappears in Marx. The messiah will arrive, but in contrast to the indefinite waiting of the Jews for the messiah, the proletarian class is already active and will realize the messianic labor, which is salvation. Whereas Christian salvation is a post-mortem, otherworldly salvation, Marxist salvation is salvation on earth.

In the tradition of the prophets

Jesus tell Rachel of his confidence in a collective messiah. His words have their basis in the prophetic texts and especially in the account of the "dry bones", one of the most suggestive passages of the prophet Ezekiel (37,1-14). Paul also takes up the idea of the collective messiah in 1 Corinthians 12,1-31. From the times of the prophet Micah (2,12-13) the idea of the messianic status of the poor began to enter into the Israelite mentality: a "remnant" of the people of Israel, held captive in Babylon, would be the bearer of the messianic promises (Zephaniah 3,11-13). Jesus was faithful to this tradition and never sought to hold a personal monopoly on messianic action. He saw himself as integrated into the humble messianism of the poor, and he rejected the individually personalized and triumphalist type of messianism that many of his fellow Jews were hoping for.

The Christians are Christs and Messiahs

Jesus of Nazareth was a man, and he is also a symbol of humanity and for humanity. Affirming him as a symbol means that he is more than the concrete individual, Jesus of Nazareth, because thousands upon thousands of persons in the course of these two thousand years are included in him.

Since the word "Christian" derives from the word "Christ", the Greek word for "anointed" or "messiah", then Christians are people who no longer expect an individual messiah, but are rather themselves messiahs. They are messiahs for one another and with one another, they are liberators of one another, and together they all build a world of human relations inspired in attitudes and activities they learned from Jesus: bread and goods are shared, the sick are cared for, differences are celebrated, strangers are welcomed, women live in equality with men…. They don't perform miracles or extraordinary works, nor do they expect such things from any "special" person, any individual savior, or any leader or boss. Rather, their attitudes and their actions are decided upon jointly; they are debated and organized in community, a community of messiahs, a messianic community.

Interview 97
IN THE NAME OF GOD?

RACHEL Attention, studios, please don't me pass any more calls. No more calls, understand?

JESUS What's the matter, Rachel?

RACHEL There are still problems. Some people were upset about the last interviews, and they've petitioned the telecommunications commission to have the license of Emisoras Latinas revoked. But please don't worry, listening audience. If they cut us off the airwaves, we'll keep broadcasting on the Internet.

JESUS But what are those people so upset about?

RACHEL Everything. Now it turns out that you didn't found a church, you didn't found a religion, and you're not even the messiah. They don't understand anything.

JESUS The search for God has been a long one, and it's not over yet. They'll understand some day.

RACHEL All we need now is for you to change even the God we've believed in, the one we've prayed to…

JESUS And what's the name of that God, Rachel?

RACHEL Well, you know that the Jews call him Yahweh, but for some Christians it's Jehovah. And in the religion of Islam, the Muslims know God as Allah. What is the true name of God?

JESUS Yahweh, Jehovah, Allah – they're all beautiful names.

RACHEL And wars have been waged for all of them, some invoking one God, others invoking another… They've killed one another in crusades, conquests, religious wars….

JESUS Cain is forever shedding the blood of his brother.

RACHEL And always in the name of God, or in one of his surnames. When we studied history in school we learned about Roman Christians fighting against Orthodox Christians, Romans against Lutherans, Anglicans against Puritans – I can't even remember them all now.

JESUS They all were taking the name of God in vain. Don't you think that there can be no worse offense against God than making war in God's name, killing people in God's name?

RACHEL Yes, it's truly scandalous. And there's no need to read about it in history books. Right now, even as we transmit this interview, the Israelis are insisting that this is the land promised to them by God, and they want to drive all the Palestinians out of it. Meanwhile the Christian west is making war against the Muslims, and the Muslims talk about a "holy war" against the Christian countries. What do you think of all that?

JESUS I think it's pure arrogance to think that someone has the true God and has the right to impose him on others.

RACHEL Even so, God must support some religion especially, right? Could we say that God is Catholic?

JESUS God?

RACHEL Well, at least, Christian?

JESUS God? You are Christian, Rachel, and many of your listeners are, but God….

RACHEL God what?

JESUS God is neither Christian nor Jew nor … nor any religion. God is too great to be encompassed in a religion.

RACHEL So there should be no proselytism, no missionaries to save souls and convert infidels? There should be no preachers?

JESUS It's those preachers who need to be converted – converted to a humility that recognizes that they know nothing about God. There will never be peace in this world until people understand that there is truth in all religions, but that no religion can contain all the Truth of God or all God's Beauty or all God's Love.

RACHEL So in the end, God has no name?

JESUS God has every name. Look, I had several brothers and sisters. My mother gave us each a name. And we each called her by a special name. I always called her Mom, but my older sister preferred to call her Birdie. Simon used to call her by her Aramaic name, Maryam, and the youngest boy called her Mimi all her life. She used to laugh at the different names we gave her, but she responded to all of them. That's the way God is he's a mother who hears all the names by which we call on him.

RACHEL That's a nice story, but I don't think it will convince the popes, or the Talibans, or the inquisitors, or any of those people who keep killing for their religion. And when they aren't killing, they're excommunicating and condemning people in the name of God.

JESUS Well, they'll have to understand that the God of the Armies is an idol, and that God's real name is Peace. Or Shalom, as they say in my people's language, or Salaam, in the language of our Arab brothers and sisters. Peace be with you, Rachel!

RACHEL With this greeting of Peace from Jesus Christ, I mean, from Jesus, without the Christ … and from a secret spot in Galilee, this is Rachel Perez, reporting for Emisoras Latinas.

MUSIC

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INTERVIEW 97: BACKGROUND MATERIAL

An unpronounceable name

For Judaism, the religion in which Jesus was raised, the name of God is unpronounceable. The name is written with the four letters YHWH (a tetragram). The Jews never say that name, since the four consonants that make it up are considered ineffable. In order to pronounce the name, it would be necessary to insert the vowels, but for the Jews that would mean giving a human being power over divinity and so would limit God. *The name of God is not pronounced; it is only contemplated,* according to pious Jews. The tetragram also reveals the nature of Jewish culture, which is very devoted to texts, to reading, to the scriptures. The written Hebrew alphabet contains only consonants. The person reading Hebrew must insert the vowels, so that the reading itself become a kind of creation or interpretation.

The monotheistic religions

In the history of world religions the "inventor" of monotheism (belief in one God) was Moses. For centuries, though, the monotheism of the Hebrew followers of Moses did not consist in believing that there were no other gods; rather, it affirmed, and also imposed, the supremacy of their God, Yahweh, the God of Israel, over the gods of the neighboring peoples.

The patriarchal religions of antiquity were built on two pillars: polytheism (belief in many gods, each of which was in charge of a part of reality: water, earth, intelligence, love, etc.) and anthropomorphism (belief in gods that resembled humans). Moses proclaimed the absolute preeminence of the God Yahweh over all other gods, and he established a strict prohibition against making any images of God. In the face of the prevailing polytheism and anthropomorphism, this turned out to be a very important innovation. Moses also introduced another new dimension to religion, which was a concentration on morality: obedience to the Law, more than performance of cult and ritual, was understood as the best way to please God.

The monotheist religions include Judaism, Islam, and Christianity (despite its confusing formulation of the dogma of the Trinity). Also monotheist is Sikhism, a religion in India founded by the mystical Guru

Nanak; it developed in the early 16th century in the context of conflict between Hinduism and Islam. Sikhism is now the fifth largest world religion; it has 23 million adherents, 19 million of whom live in India. Sikhs believe in one God, and like the other three monotheistic religions, they base their faith on a sacred book, the Guru Granth Sahib.

Monotheism and violence

The different monotheistic faiths defend the idea of an absolute truth revealed by God himself through sacred persons and scriptures. The polytheistic religions are not so pretentious: their gods behave like human beings, and like human beings they can be either tolerant or intolerant, inclusivist or exclusivist. This explains why the Greeks and the Romans were willing to include the God of the Jews in their pantheon and why the Jews never accepted in their Temple the "pagan" gods of the "gentiles".

For that reason the religions which believe themselves to be "unique" or "true" religions bear within themselves the seeds of intolerance and violence. History shows that the outwardly oriented religions are especially violent, that is, the religions that are proselytizing, missionary, and combative. They are continually trying to extend their reach and impose themselves on others; they seek not only to convince others, but also to conquer them. This has been the tradition of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, and the Sikhs also have waged wars against Hindus and Muslims.

Judaism has known violence and "holy wars": Yahweh is a tribal God, a jealous warrior, the "God of Hosts". There has also been an abundance of cruel violence in Christianity, especially with the Crusades and the conquest of America. For centuries different groups within Christianity have fought against one another: the papacy has waged wars against all kinds of "heretics", Protestants have waged wars against Catholics, and Catholics have against Protestants; there have been wars of Calvinists against Catholics, of Lutherans against Anabaptists, of Catholics against Huguenots, etc. The wars with Christian "surnames" have been countless.

"Holy war"

There has been and still is much violence in Islam, among other reasons because its prophet, Muhammad, known by his followers as the one chosen to receive the divine revelation in the Koran, was also a warrior renowned for his military victories.

After Muhammad's military conquests, the Muslim faith spread mainly by pacific means, such as commerce and the preaching of missionaries. From the 8th century on, the military conquests of Islam, such as the conquest of the Iberian peninsula, developed into political regimes in which the three monotheisms (Islam, Christianity, and Judaism) lived together peacefully. Nevertheless, Islam is still characterized by conflict.

According to Dominique Urvoy, professor of Islamic studies in the University of Toulous-Le Mirail, France, Islam has been marked by division ever since it first appeared. Urvoy writes: *Islam has been built on a threefold opposition: the opposition of the prophet Muhammad to the other prophets contemporary with him; the opposition between those who believe and those who do not; and the opposition between the heirs of the prophet and the "usurpers", which culminated in the division*

between the Shiites and the Sunni. This last opposition has caused countless wars among different factions of Islam.

Even today the Koran is cited as a text that exhorts Muslim to undertake "jihad", a concept that really should not be understood as "holy war". Rather, its precise meaning is "striving to reach God," which involves a person's moral effort to overcome his or her own imperfections in the name of God. For true Muslims, only in the most extreme cases does such striving oblige them to undertake a military struggle against the enemies of the faith.

Until yesterday, until today…

Religiously motivated violence is not something from the past, something in history books. Nor is it something unique to Islam. In recent times there have been massacres and wars between Maronite Christians and Muslims, between Shiite Muslims and Sunni Muslims, and between Syrians, Palestinians, Druze, and Israelis. There have also been conflicts between Iranians and Iraqis, between Indians and Pakistanis, between Hindus and Sikhs, between Singhalese Buddhists and Tamil Hindus. There were violent confrontations between Buddhist monks and the Catholic government of Vietnam and between Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland. Although there are always economic and political interests mixed up in all these conflicts, the violence has religious roots; it stems from the logic that one of the groups possesses the true God, from the conviction that if God is "with us", with our religion, with our nation, then everything is permitted against "the others".

The Bible does not encourage dialogue among religions

With frankness and humility the Protestant theologian and scripture professor Jorge Pixley wrote: *We must make a confession: the Bible does not have a central message that encourages inter-religious dialogue or theology. It is a work dominated by the victory of the "Only Yahweh" party in the reform of Josiah. That reform, even though it could not be imposed in Judea, provided the inspiration for the books that came to make up our Bible. The commandment "You shall not have other gods before me" is interpreted as a rejection of the truth of other religions and the existence of other gods. In the words of Jeremiah 10, those gods are nothingness, vanity (in Hebrew,* hevel*). The only true God is our own. Nevertheless, there survives in the Bible evidence of a much more tolerant practice that had previously been widespread. Until the time of Josiah the Israelites used to visit the sanctuaries of Yahweh and also those of Baal and other gods. If Yahweh saved them from their enemies, then Baal and/or Asherah would guarantee them fertility.*

"Biblical doctrine" is not conscious of important elements that it owes to long dialogues that were carried on with non-Israelite religious traditions of earlier times. Jesus himself appears to have been willing to consider a posture that was more open than that of other Jews of his time. However that may be, in the 21st century, at a time when religions meet up with one another in almost any neighborhood of the world, we must learn to undertake dialogue with religions that are not our own.

A criminal history

The German historian, theologian and philosopher Karlheinz Deschner, considered "the worst critic of of the church in the 20th century", started publishing in 1970 a nine-volume work called *The Criminal*

History of Christianity. These volumes document his carefully researched studies of how the history of Christian beliefs and dogmas has been marked by violence and abuse of power. He has also written other excellent books on the same subject. According to Deschner, *whoever does not write universal history as criminal history becomes an accomplice of the crimes.*

Why, oh why?

How has the Church come to dominate both our public and our private life? How could the pacifists of the catacombs become the enthusiastic priests of the battlefields? Why did intolerance become so strong that it went to the extreme of resisting every sign of cultural and scientific progress in the world? How did philosophy succumb to the dictatorship of theology? How did faith become the biggest business of all time? What justification can there be for the countless wars waged by Christian states "in the name of Christ"?

These are some of the questions that German historian Horst Hermann asks and tries to answer in his book, *Two Thousand Years of Torture in God's Name.*

"The God Factor"

After the attack on the Twin Towers in New York on September 11th, 2001, the subject of "holy war" and the violence exercised by human beings in the name of God was debated everywhere.

Among the many reflections on this topic, we highlight the text "The God Factor", written by the Portuguese Nobel Prize winner, José Saramago. We cite some excerpts from what he wrote at that time: *It has already been stated that religions, all of them without exception, have never served to bring people together in harmony; to the contrary, they have been and continue to be the cause of unspeakable suffering, of massacres, of monstrous physical and spiritual acts of violence that make up one of the darkest chapters of our miserable human history. …*

At least as a sign of respect for life, we should have the courage to proclaim this evident and demonstrable truth in every situation. However, most religious believers not only pretend to ignore the truth, but they rise up in wrath and intolerance against those for whom God is no more than a name, just a name, the name we gave him one day because of our fear of dying, the name which would end up blocking our way to real humanization. Instead, he promised us paradises and threatened us with hells, both of them false and disgraceful insults to the intelligence and common sense that it has cost us so much effort to attain. …

Nietzsche says that everything would be permitted if God did not exist, and I respond that it precisely because of and in the name of God that everything has been permitted and justified, mainly all that is worst, all that is most horrendous and cruel. … Like the Taliban today, the Inquisition for centuries was also a terrorist organization, dedicated to perversely interpreting sacred texts which should have been more respected by those who say they believe in them. It was a monstrous connivance between religion and state against freedom of conscience and against the most human of rights: the right to say no, the right to heresy, the right to chose something else, which is what that the word "heresy" basically means. And in all this, God is innocent …

If there are believing readers (of whatever creed) who have managed to put up with the repugnance these words probably inspire, I do not ask them to convert to the atheism of the one who is writing them. I simply ask them to understand, with feeling if it cannot be with reason, that if God exists, there is only one God, and that in relation to him what matters least is the name they have been taught to assign him.

Religious liberty: a victory for humankind

After so much blood shed in the name of God because of rivalries rooted in the different names of God, the conscience of humankind has become more oriented toward tolerance, respect, and religious liberty, which means freedom of conscience and freedom to practice any religion or no religion at all. This freedom is one of the important conquests of modernity.

Hans Küng, Catholic theologian and student of world religions, recalls that the great Enlightenment work "Nathan the Wise" (1779), written by the German poet Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, showed for the first time that tolerance among the different Christian confessions and among the different religions was an indispensable condition for peace among nations. Nevertheless, around the same time, Pope Pius VI rejected the concepts of freedom of religion, freedom of conscience, freedom of the press, and everything contained in what he called *the abominable philosophy of the rights of man.*

The Catholic Church was in fact the principal opponent of the principles of liberty, fraternity and equality championed by the French Revolution. According to Küng, during the 19th century, when those ideals became widespread, the Vatican *was the most retrograde government in all of Europe.* The Pope rejected railroads, gas lights, suspended bridges, etc. The papacy was also opposed to vaccines, which it prohibited in 1815 by citing the words of Pope Leo XII: *Whoever has recourse to vaccines ceases to be a child of God. … Disease is a judgment of God, and vaccines are challenges hurled against heaven.* With ideas like those, how was the Vatican going to accept religious freedom?

What unites religions is more than what separates them

The World Conference of Religions for Peace, held in 1970 in Kyoto, Japan, brought together Christians, Jews, Buddhists, Confucians, Hindus, Muslims, Shintos, Shiks, Zoroastrians, and representatives of other minority religions. It was a first gathering called to help people realize and understand that what unites religions is much greater than what separates them. The agreement reached among all the religions centered on these points: affirmation of the unity of the human family and of the dignity of all human beings; rejection of the idea of might being equivalent to right; the confidence that love, compassion and altruism are stronger than hate, enmity and selfishness; and the conviction that it is a duty to take the side of the oppressed over against the oppressors.

Women in Black

As a reaction against the war between the Palestinians and the Israelis, which also has religious roots, there arose in 1988 a small group of Jewish and Arab women who dressed in black. They met together in Jerusalem to carry out silent, peaceful protests against the Israeli military presence in Gaza and the West Bank. Since then the movement has kept growing and continues to struggle for a

just peace between Israel and Palestine; it has also reached dozen of countries involved in military conflicts. The initiative makes clear the role that women can play in questioning war. The "philosophy" of the Women in Black is expressed in the following manifesto which they made public:

As Palestinian and Israel women, we know that our peoples can live in this land, that our sons and daughters deserve a life with peace and dignity. We do not want them to be killed or to become killers. We must put a stop to this madness. We must put a stop to the use of brute force.

Let the women talk. Let the women act. Let us Palestinian and Israeli women show the way. We women can find a way to end this circle of violence. Men tell us: "Don't be frightened." They tell us: "Be strong." We are frightened, and we want them also to be frightened. We don't want to be "strong." We don't want them to think that they are strong enough to make another nation disappear. We believe that each and every person has the right to live in peace and with dignity.

We want to share the resources of this earth, its water, its wine, and its sacred places. It is possible to share Jerusalem. The whole area can be shared between two equal and independent nations. Israel should not dominate the life of the Palestinians. Neither Palestine nor Israel should believe that it is possible to achieve peace through violence. Let us women discover the way that the men have not discovered. We demand that all the negotiating teams should include at least 50 percent women, whether among Palestinian and Israeli leaders, on the United Nations teams, or among the representatives of the governments involved in trying to resolve the conflict. Women are going to talk: they are not going to shoot.

There are two many men with too much ego involved in burning up this tiny piece of earth. Let us women talk. We can bring peace. Men talk about security based on force. We women know that real security means being good neighbors. We do not want the next generation to wear uniforms and to go to war. We want them to know about self-determination and dignity, without the need to fight. Let the women talk. Let the women act.

The fourteenth meeting of the Women in Black was held in Valencia, Spain, in August, 2007, with the slogan, "Let us banish war from history and from our lives." It was attended by 400 women from 40 countries on all the continents: Afghanistan, Colombia, Sahara, Chechnya, Congo, Zimbabwe, Morocco, Philippines, etc.

God: a human word

The Brazilian feminist theologian Ivone Gebara states: *God is a human word, a human name. We should no longer use it to speak of a superior Being who exists beyond our world, outside of it. Rather, we should use it to speak about relations. It is in relations that we make God. God does not exist in himself, but in ethics, in beauty, in love. Jesus also experienced God as relation. For the divine is not outside or above what is human – it is in the relations among humans and in the relations among living beings.*

Interview 98
HE ROSE?

RACHEL Emisoras Latinas is nearing the end of its special coverage of the second coming of Jesus Christ to earth. Our microphones are still situated as we broadcast from an undisclosed site in Galilee, and with us, almost ready to leave, is Jesus Christ.

JESUS Peace be with, Rachel.

RACHEL I see that you're in a very good mood this morning.

JESUS Yes, I'm happy. Very much so.

RACHEL And will you tell us the reason why?

JESUS Last night I was conversing with some people in a neighborhood near here. They have suffered terribly, but they were still laughing. They invited me to eat with them. They have a little group, you know? They're struggling so that things will change on this earth. I felt that once again I was back there with Peter and John and Mary and …

RACHEL Were they Christians?

JESUS I don't know. I didn't ask them that. But they were very united. They all had one heart and one soul.

RACHEL I don't want to spoil your good mood, but I have to take advantage of these last interviews to ask you a crucial question, a question that's burning in the hearts of many of our listeners.

JESUS What's it about?

RACHEL I've avoided asking it before, because … well, so that people wouldn't say that we reporters are always prying into our guests' personal matters.

JESUS Don't beat around the bush, Rachel. What do you want to know?

RACHEL Well, you see, Jesus, all Christian faith and the whole Christian religion is based on … on your resurrection – on the fact that you rose on the third day. On Friday they crucified you, on Saturday nothing happened, but on Sunday you rose. Is this true, or is it something the gospels invented? Is it another metaphor, or ….? Why are you laughing?

JESUS I thought you were going to ask me about whether I had children or love affairs. Listen, Rachel, when what happened in Jerusalem was over, the people in the movement were discouraged and felt defeated. And with good reason. During that Passover feast, the

time we went into the Temple and drove out the merchants, a lot of people were filled with hope, and I was more than anybody. We dreamt that God was now going to strike a blow for poor people. … But you know what happened. They struck down the shepherd, and the sheep scattered. It was a tough experience for everybody.

RACHEL You died and … what did you disciples do?

JESUS At first, according to what they tell me, they hid themselves. They closed themselves up in a house. Then the first ones to break out of the fear were the women. My mother, Mary Magdalene, Salome and other women wouldn't resign themselves to my being dead. They began to give testimony, they announced that I was alive.

RACHEL But … were you alive? I mean, were you risen from the dead?

JESUS Yes, they raised me up.

RACHEL What do you mean, "they"?

JESUS The women.

RACHEL Excuse me, but I'm not understanding anything. Was the grave empty?

JESUS The heart was full, full of faith, full of hope.

RACHEL What happened that Sunday morning when Mary Magdalene went to the grave where they had placed your body?

JESUS What happened was that the Spirit of God filled her with strength and with joy – her and the other women also. And they encouraged the men, who were still acting like cowards. And all of them went out into the streets to tell the whole world that God's Kingdom had arrived, that things can change and are going to change.

RACHEL Excuse me for insisting, but when they were announcing this, were you alive or not?

JESUS Of course, Rachel, I was alive in them.

RACHEL Now I'm the one who has to ask *you* not to beat around the bush. Did you rise from the dead? That is, did the grave open up, and did you get up and walk out of the grave, or fly out it – it doesn't matter – but did your body get transformed into … into… ?

JESUS It is the spirit that rises, Rachel, not the flesh. The Spirit of God who gives us life is the one who makes us rise.

RACHEL Yes, but … your body?

JESUS The dust returns to the dust from which it came. And the spirit is reborn in community. And there it multiplies, like the grains of wheat.

RACHEL But then … you right now … what are you? … who are you?

JESUS I am Jesus, Rachel. But stop asking questions. Forget about me. I want to take you to meet that community I told you about.

RACHEL But am I seeing you with these eyes, or can it be that ….?

JESUS We see only with the heart, Rachel. On that Sunday the women saw me with their hearts. And now, come and meet these folks. That's where I live!

RACHEL Well, okay, but … wait until I sign off from the program. For Emisoras Latinas, this is Rachel Perez.

MUSIC

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INTERVIEW 98: BACKGROUND MATERIAL

Resurrection for the insurrection

It was only about a hundred years before Jesus' time that the idea of a "resurrection" after death first appeared in Judaism, and it appeared in connection with the guerrilla rebellion of the seven Maccabee brothers and their mother, who were fighting against the Greek domination of Israel.

After the Maccabees fell in battle while fighting for their homeland, their mother and the mothers of the other Jews who died in the war claimed that their sons could not be dead, they could not die. They were convinced that God would raise them up again. (2 Maccabees 7). Starting from the time of that nationalist struggle of the Maccabees, the people of Israel began to believe that the martyrs for national liberation, the heroes of the resistance against foreign troops, could not remain dead forever. The second book of Maccabees does not speak of the resurrection of all people, but only of those who fell in combat, those who were struck down by the wicked in the prime of life. Thus the belief in resurrection arose in Israel out of a history of insurrection.

Jesus knew about the heroism of his fellow Palestinians, and in his own days, when the country was occupied and controlled militarily by the Roman empire, the Maccabees were admired by many people for their courageous resistance to imperial domination. The name Judas, so discredited in our own time, was very common in the time of Jesus, since it was the name of the great guerrilla leader Judas Maccabeus.

Jesus believed in the resurrection of the dead

In Jesus' time there were not many people who believed in resurrection, as the mothers of the Maccabees had. The Sadducees, who were ardent defenders of the system, heaped ridicule on such a belief (Matthew 22,23-33). As influential, powerful people who were well off in this life, they did not believe either in the arrival of the messiah or in life after death. They were allied with Roman power and the economic benefits that came from such an alliance, and in their "theology" they defended the idea that people are rewarded by God on this earth, precisely in the form of money, status, and privilege. Their lack of "hope" was thus quite understandable.

There is no doubt that Jesus believed in resurrection. Feeling himself to be a prophet and being well aware of the violent deaths that many prophets had suffered in the history of Israel, he suspected that he also would suffer a violent death before his time. The image of the grain of wheat that has to die in order to be reborn in the plant is a metaphor that well expresses this faith of Jesus (John 12,24).

Resurrection or reincarnation?

The idea of life after death is present everywhere, in all peoples, cultures and religions. Whether people believe in resurrection or reincarnation or in some other form of life after death depends on the culture in which they have been brought up or have adopted. However the belief is expressed, what underlies the differences is the affirmation that death cannot be the end-point of our lives; it cannot be the final frontier, but must be the gateway to another form of life. Both resurrection and reincarnation share that same intuition.

Do not leave us, come back to life!

Cesar Valle's poem "Masa" (1937) expresses beautifully what must have happened in Jerusalem after the death of Jesus: as the gospels relate, the women who were major actors in Jesus' movement were the ones who brought about the resurrection as a fruit of their passionate, community-oriented faith.

At the end of the battle,
With the combatant already dead, a man came toward him
And said: "Don't die, I love you so!"
But the body, oh!, kept dying.

Two more came near him and repeated:
"Don't leave us! Courage! Return to life!"
But the body, oh!, kept dying.

Then came twenty, a hundred, a thousand, five hundred thousand,
Crying out: "So much love and not to be able to undo death!"
But the body, oh!, kept dying.

Millions of individuals surrounded him,
With a shared prayer: "Stay with us, brother!"

But the body, oh!, kept dying.

Then all the people on the earth
Surrounded him: they saw the body sad, then excited;
It slowly got up,
Embraced the first man and set off walking …

In the face of an unjust death

The idea of resurrection is a way of transforming death by giving it a meaning. When a death is premature, when it is unjust, the human mind searches for this meaning in order to make death more tolerable or acceptable. In many rural areas poor families who watch their little children die of hunger or sickness state that "God took them away so they would be little angels." The pain of losing a child at an early age is made more bearable by such religious ideas.

In 2005 the religious sister Dorothy Stang, who fought for the lives of the poor farmers in Pará, Brazil, was killed by the big ranch owners. It was an unjust death. The day of her burial her friends were saying: "Today, Dorothy, we do not bury you, we sow you." Something very similar must have happened with Jesus. And it was especially the women of Jesus' movement who refused to be resigned to death; it was the women who with their words defied and broke through that limit that an unjust death meant for them. They were the ones who bore witness that he was still alive; they were the ones resolved to keep him alive.

A piece of resurrection

Catholic theologian Eugen Drewermann states the following: *Resurrection cannot be an isolated event determined from without. Resurrection is the basic experience of one who believes in Jesus. How do I understand it? Resurrection is identical to confidence. Any person who in the face of death creates a space for life attains a small piece of resurrection. We all know that there are many ways of getting out of ourselves and committing ourselves to a fuller life. Every separation, every renunciation and every grief are, then, a smaller or a greater "dying", and they are therefore a liberating maturity, a true resurrection.*

She brought him to life and returns him to life

British writer Lesley Hazleton develops a brilliant and daring image in her book *Mary: A Flesh-and-Blood Biography of the Virgin Mother.* She has Mary enter her son's grave accompanied by Mary Magdalene and the other women. Together they defy the horror and the pain of the death they have witnessed in helpless desperation. Then Mary approaches Jesus, firmly holds up his head and "returns him to life". She is able to do it, for she is the mother: if she brought him to life, then she can return him to life.

Hazleton rounds out this image with a basic idea, one that is often ignored: *Christianity began with these women, not with Paul or with Peter or with any of the long parade of saints and popes, but with these women in the tomb. They are the founding nucleus of Christianity, the last persons to see the body of Jesus and the first to see him risen.*

And she explains why it happened that way: *Maryam has to do this for her own good, as well as for her son. The alternative is to be reduced to pain and to the most horrible nightmares for the rest of her life. Maryam could not save her son. She could not offer herself in his place. But she could still act. She could break with the inertia, free herself from the passive role of just watching, and transform herself into an actor. "Don't let this go by without anyone noticing," she must have said to herself while moving into action. "Don't be the woman who just suffers in silence. Above all, don't remain quiet." And afterwards, once she resolved what she would not do, she decided what she would do: "Make them hear your voice. Do something so that this sacrifice makes sense. Make it important for the world."*

Mary acted as did the mother of the Maccabees, as have all the mothers who keep alive their children who have died before their time.

Love resurrected Jesus

Hazleton reflects: *When we read the Gospels as history instead of theology, we reduce the greatness of their metaphors and deprive ourselves of their supreme mystery, so that we are left with only a mediocre detective story. Naturally, resurrection in the literal sense is impossible, and the greatness of the idea resides precisely in that. But saying that it definitely did not happen is as senseless as saying that it did, because what is important about resurrection is not its literal meaning, but its metaphorical meaning – in other words, not its physical, but its metaphysical, dimension.*

Resurrection has meaning only at another level of knowledge, a level that annuls the factual and reaches the deepest parts of the soul and the heart. Maryam, Mary Magdalene and the "many other women" knew that the essence of resurrection was not in the flesh, but in the spirit: the human spirit. "It was love that resurrected Jesus," declared Ernest Renan, the great 19th-century historian of Christianity. And in truth it was. We bewail most the death of those we love most deeply. Whether it was the maternal love of Maryam, the sensual love of Mary Magdalene, or the loving faith of the other women, that was the force that transformed the pain into joy, the desperation into hope, the end into the beginning.

Interview 99
WAS IT WORTH IT?

RACHEL Friends of Emisoras Latinas, we continue our broadcast from an undisclosed location in Galilee, the northern province of Palestine, and we are accompanying Jesus during the last days of his second coming to earth. So, you're going away, Jesus?

JESUS Yes, Rachel. I've seen enough. I've heard enough. Now it's time to go back.

RACHEL When we started our interviews, you told us that after being away so long, nearly two thousand years, you wanted to know how things were going in the world. You wanted to know, above all, what your followers were doing.

JESUS Yes, that's why I came.

RACHEL And what kind of an evaluation do you make now?

JESUS After all I've seen and heard, Rachel, I confess I feel sad, and also angry. The people on top, the same ones as always, have waylaid my message. They've said things that I never said, and they've hidden things I said. God made us in his image and likeness, but they have fabricated a god in their own image and likeness, small enough to fit into their pockets.

RACHEL I find you very impatient.

JESUS I was always quite impatient. I wanted God's Kingdom here and now …

RACHEL Hold on a minute, Jesus, … Yes, hello?

STRABELI Hello, this is Carlos Strabeli speaking.

RACHEL Where are you calling from, Carlos? And how could you locate us, with all the problems we've been having these days with our signal?

STRABELI I'm calling from Sao Paulo, Brazil, and we located you through the Internet, on the webpage of Emisoras Latinas. In our community we have been closely following all these interviews, Jesus, all of them, one after another….

RACHEL And what do you think? Have you liked them?

STRABELI We believe in him. For our community the interviews have been a real liberation. We are very thankful. And we have a word of farewell for Jesus Christ.

JESUS And what is that word, Carlos, my friend?

STRABELI We want to bid you farewell and to tell you not to leave in sadness. We want you to know that there are many communities like ours here in Sao Paulo, here in Brazil, here in all Latin America, and everywhere. … Young people who have learned to share what they have, who refuse to adore the God called Money … People who are as impatient as you are for things to change … People who struggle so the world becomes the way you dreamed it should be and the way God wants it. Be certain of this, Jesus there are many of us men and women who think and feel the same as you.

JESUS But tell me, Carlos, are there no Pharisees there where you are? No rulers who persecute you?

STRABELI Yes, of course there are. They persecute us, but they don't defeat us. They command us to keep quiet, but we keep talking. Our history is made up of mountains of martyrs, of fighters, of priests and laypeople and monks and catechists who made the option for the poor, who announced the true Kingdom of God and who gave their lives for that kingdom of justice.

JESUS Those are my real disciples.

STRABELI They've killed us so many times, we've died so many times, but we keep on rising up and walking! Like you, Jesus Christ! Hand in hand, companion!

JESUS Hand in hand, Carlos!

STRABELI Long live the movement!

JESUS May it live long!

RACHEL What do you think, Jesus Christ, I mean, Jesus? Was your struggle worth the trouble?

JESUS Of course it was, Rachel. I was speaking before out of anger. But I also leave here with much joy, with tremendous joy. Look at those communities our friend is talking about. They are alive and they exist all over the place. They are leaven in the dough, light in the darkness. In these days I have got to know many people like that, generous people who work for others, who care for life, who live with hope and trust in the true God.

RACHEL And so you think that this world, despite everything, can be set straight?

JESUS I think it can. I want it to. That is what God wants. But now, Rachel, what God wants is this downpour that's going to drown us…

RACHEL Run, let's go take cover under those trees. Listening audience, we will take a break because of a sudden rainstorm, but we'll be back with you immediately. This is Rachel Perez of Emisoras Latinas.

MUSIC

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INTERVIEW 99: BACKGROUND MATERIAL

We believe

Nothing, almost nothing, of what Jesus lived and gave his life for has become reality in history. In today's world money is what comes first, and God is shoved aside, though still present in our brothers and sisters. War, violence, greed and falsehood continue to reign. But at the same time that for which Jesus lived and gave his life has become reality in many people who choose God rather than money, who work for peace, who share what they possess, who struggle for justice and decide for Life. What has greater weight? Who has greater weight?

Who can calculate which weighs more? Despite everything, it was worth the trouble. It *is* worth the trouble. Jesus of Nazareth, that poor peasant from Galilee who had no academic training and no religious authority, inspires in us a passion to transform the idea of God – another God is possible – and to live a life the makes us human and saves the planet – other World is possible. Inspired by Jesus, we have written these interviews with him. We believe in him.

Interview 100
GOD IS MALE?

RACHEL Evening is falling in Galilee. After the rain, a rainbow stretches across the freshly washed sky. Standing beside me is Jesus, the one from Nazareth, who in few minutes, he tells me will bring to an end his second coming to earth. How about a greeting for our audience, Jesus?

JESUS Gladly, Rachel. Peace to all my brothers, and very especially today peace to my sisters, to the women who hear us.

RACHEL Why that special greeting?

JESUS Because of what I'm going to tell you.

RACHEL When we spoke a few days ago, on our way to Magdala, you hinted to me that you had some sensational news for this final interview.

JESUS Yes, I have some good news that will delight everyone who's listening to you.

RACHEL Well, … our microphones are at your disposal.

JESUS Do you see this valley, Rachel? The fields are already prepared for sowing. There has been plenty of rain. What I'm going to tell you today will fall upon many deaf ears, but one day they will open up and understand.

RACHEL Why are you being so mysterious?

JESUS Because I'm going to speak about God.

RACHEL But we've spoken about God in all our interviews, haven't we?

JESUS And how did you imagine that God we spoke about?

RACHEL Well, I don't know …

JESUS For a long time, Rachel, when we thought of God or prayed to him, we imagined him to be a powerful king, … like an elderly man … with a white beard …

RACHEL And isn't that the way he is?

JESUS God is not male, Rachel.

RACHEL What's that you're saying?

JESUS I said God is not male.

RACHEL Could you please explain yourself better. I don't understand what you mean.

JESUS In my time I didn't understand it either. I couldn't understand it. I used to pray, "Abba, our father". I never prayed, "Imma, our mother". I did not know God that way, but now my eyes have seen her.

RACHEL And what have you seen, Jesus? Tell us.

JESUS It's a very ancient story, one that we've forgotten.

MUJER *For centuries and centuries, for all the earth's peoples God was a mother. They adored the Great Goddess, the Giver of Life, the one from whom all is born and to which all returns. The Mother Goddess looked down upon the earth from the Moon, which waxed and waned in the nights and the rose again resplendent.*

For centuries and centuries, hers were the animals and the green vegetation that covers the earth. Hers was the celebration and the dance, hers was the joy.

During centuries and centuries, God was female for all the peoples of the earth. But then the era of greed arrived, and the warrior gods who loved to sow fear and demand sacrifices supplanted the Great Goddess and sought to hide her. They wanted to kill her outright. And right up till today those male gods remained in command of the heavens.

RACHEL But the God you preached, Jesus, two thousand years ago was a God of love and compassion.

JESUS Yes, he was a good father, but after all a man. Now the time has arrived for us to understand the damage done when God is seen as male, then men see themselves as gods. They give orders, they make decisions, they wage wars. Believe me, Rachel, another God is possible. That God of whom we've been speaking all these days is not a king or a judge or an old bearded man.

RACHEL And so … is God a woman? Is that what you want to tell us?

JESUS No, God is neither male nor female. Nobody has ever seen God. How can we name him? What word could express him? But the time is coming, and we are already in it, when his motherly tenderness becomes once against resplendent.

RACHEL And all this … why are you telling me about it?

JESUS Because you can understand it. Two thousand years ago it was women who announced the good news that I was alive. Now, you women are the ones who must announce the good news that God has a womanly countenance.

RACHEL But I … Wait …

JESUS What are you doing, Rachel?

RACHEL Nothing, pinching myself, hitting myself, trying to wake up …

JESUS Wake up?

RACHEL I'm not sure, but maybe I'm dreaming … Maybe you never came, nor went, nor returned. Maybe I never spoke with you, or you with me … and all that's happened in these days has been just a mirage.

JESUS Why do you say that?

RACHEL Because what you're telling me now and all that you've told me in these interviews is … is too delightful to be true.

JESUS That's exactly what Mary was thinking as she left the grave. … But now I'm going, Rachel. I leave this precious pearl in your hands. Pass it on.

RACHEL Pass it on?

JESUS Yes, pass it on to your listeners.

RACHEL I'll do that. Good-bye, Master. Now you'll let me call you that, won't you?

JESUS Good-bye, Rachel. Maybe we'll meet up on my third coming. God be with you! Goddess be with you!

RACHEL These historic days of the second coming of Jesus Christ to earth have been covered for you by Rachel Perez, of Emisoras Latinas.

MUSIC

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INTERVIEW 100: BACKGROUND MATERIAL

God has no sex, but does have gender

Every religion consists in making the invisible God visible by means of images, words and symbols. The Christian religion, with its Jewish origins, has used a multitude of masculine words, images and

symbols to make God visible. And for that reason we can assert that, although God has no sex, for thousands of years he has had a gender: the masculine gender.

We know that sex is a biological characteristic and gender is a cultural construct, and that both the feminine and the masculine are present in God as complementary expressions of life. However, in Judeo-Christian culture and in the literature of two thousand years of Christianity, God has had a decidedly masculine gender. This means that in all Christian traditions, whether Catholic or Orthodox or Protestant, and also in Islamic traditions, God is imagined, thought and conceived as male. God is a man.

If gender is a cultural construct, that means that it can be changed, because all that is "constructed" can be "deconstructed" and reconstructed. That is the issue at hand: reconstructing the face of God to include feminine features.

God was born a woman

In the history of humankind "God was born a woman." When the idea of God first arose, it was associated with the feminine. For millennia human beings, amazed at women's ability to engender the miracle of life in their bodies, venerated the Goddess and saw the divine image in the female body. They also found a divine image in the moon, which synchronized with women's cycles, and they saw divinity in all animal and plant life.

Many millennia later, about ten thousand years ago, humanity developed a culture based on the agricultural revolution, which involved accumulation of grains, control of lands, and the need to defend granaries and properties with arms. With this change, the religion of the Goddess was gradually transformed into the religion of the male God who was a mighty warrior. That God dominated the cultures of the ancient world. In Babylon Marduk supplanted the Goddess Inana-Ishtar, in Egypt Osiris replaced Isis, and in Greece Zeus unseated Gaia. The God Yahweh supplanted the fecund goddess Asherah, who was so beloved in Canaan. Thus Yahweh, the God of the Bible, the male, tribal, warrior God, was one of the gods of this stage of human history.

In order to learn more about this long process, we recommend at least three books: *The Chalice and the Blade*, by Austrian anthropologist and psychologist Riane Eisler (HarperOne, 1988); *God Was Born Woman*, by Spanish journalist Pepe Rodríguez (Ediciones B, 1999); and *The Myth of the Goddess*, by British researchers Anne Baring and Jules Cashford (Penguin, 1993).

In our genetic memory

The Chilean author Isabel Allende says of Riane Eisler's book: *With great scientific rigor, but also with passionate eloquence, Riane Eisler proves that the dream of peace is not an impossible utopia. There was in fact a very ancient epoch when participation, creativity and affection prevailed, when a benevolent Goddess reigned and people lived together with more solidarity than aggression. Eisler reveals this Goddess to us, one that has always been there, hidden in the shadows of our genetic memory. This book offers the certainty that a better world is possible … if only we could remember.*

In the prologue to the book by Baring and Cashford, Sir Laurens van der Post warns about the consequences of depriving the feminine of its sacred character:

Jules Cashford and Anne Baring have gone as far back in history as possible, following a golden thread, and from there they have traced a line up to our days. They have a great story to tell us, a story that arrives just in time, since the loss of the feminine experience is what has obliged us to face the most acute and dangerous problem of our epoch: the exploitation and rejection of our mother, the earth, our mother who has been robbed of the great reserve of life that she had prepared for us. … As far as I know, the totality of history is being told for the first time in these pages. It is a terrible, and at the same time strangely suggestive, history of the feminine, which is still victorious and spirited.

Where God is male, the males think themselves gods

In all the versions of Christianity, Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant, God is a Man. Could this gendering of God be the oldest and most hidden justification and legitimization of the inequality between men and women, and also of the violence that men exercise against women? Could it be that this root is still so firmly rooted, so deeply hidden, in the ground of our minds, that all of us, both men and women, have become anesthetized and quite unaware of its presence, so that it remains untouched?

This deep root has serious consequences in its expressions and its fruits. Where God is a Man, men feel themselves to be gods, and they act like gods, that is, like superior beings with more rights than women, including the right to dominate. In a regional assembly of evangelical women, held in Buenos Aires in the first years of the 21st century, Protestant theologian Judith VanOsdal stated this convincingly:

The image of God that is preached and employed in many churches is inadequate. In this way the churches relegate women to a second or third category, as if they were inferior beings, and thus do they contribute to rendering women's historically important leadership invisible. The churches which imagine or represent God as a male must take responsibility for creating an image which is heretical, because where God is male, the male is God. Let us agree, then, that all language is inadequate to encompass all that God is.

The Bible holds that God is Spirit. We therefore have to broaden our imaginations in order to contemplate how God transcends gender, being neither masculine nor feminine. The Word of scripture contains a rich variety of images of God, including feminine images. The Bible never speaks of God's sexuality. The term "father" is a relational term, which points toward the equality of every person as son or daughter of God. The basis of the temptation in the Garden of Eden was their wanting to become gods. This temptation continues to exist to this very day. When men hold themselves up as gods over women, we continue to suffer the consequences of this sin, the disequilibrium and injustice of gender.

A masculine divine family

In all the images we have seen since we were children, God is an old man with a long beard. He is also pictured as a king with a crown and scepter, seated on a throne. He is also a God of armies and a severe judge who issues inscrutable judgments. According to such iconography, which conforms to the Christological dogmas, God has a Son, who "became" man, which would seem to suggest that his essence prior to that "becoming" was also masculine. The third person of this "trinity", of this "divine family," is the Holy Spirit. In the Hebrew language the word "spirit" is a feminine noun (*ruah*), representing the vital, creative force of God, that which puts everything into movement and animates all life. Despite such biblical imagery, dogma teaches us that it was the Spirit who left Mary pregnant, so that we are led to think that the Spirit is a *masculine* vital principle. The result is a divine family unit that is completely masculine.

Also in liberation theology

God is a man even in such popular, liberating religious expressions as the Nicaraguan Folk Mass, which sings of him as being an "artisan, carpenter, mason and rigger". No feminine task is assigned to that God. According to the hymn, "we see" God doing various jobs: checking truck tires in the gas stations, leveling off roadways, shining shoes in the central park … We never see him washing or cooking, not to speak of nursing. He is a God who is poor and humble, but … he is male. The God of liberation theology was also a male.

What about the ancestral pre-Hispanic religions?

In the search for the feminine face of God, some studies have delved into the pre-Hispanic religions of the Americas, which are different from the Judeo-Christian tradition since each male god always appears with his feminine counterpart. In these religions the supreme principle of everything is always dual, and divinity always has a masculine side and a feminine side.

Going deeper into those traditions, however, we find that the myths of ancient Mexico present the goddesses as participating in the originating power that creates the world, but they do so almost always as victims of male gods. In the myth of the warrior god Huitzilopochtli, his mother conceives him as a virgin and is murdered. She will be the Mother Earth, and her son the Sun God, a bloody deity who will require human sacrifices. In one of the myths of the god Quetzalcoatl, he kills Tlatecutli, the goddess of heaven, and splits her in two. But in another myth of Quetzalcoatl, who is the God who discovered maize, the feminine counterpart does play a positive role: she does not let herself be killed and repudiates sacrifices.

There is still much research to be done in order to be able to recognize and distinguish the feminist "wheat" and the patriarchal "weeds" that are hidden in these myths of the archaic non-western religions.

A change that touches the heart of Christianity

The feminist theologian Ivone Gebara states: *Some historic movements, such as the women's movement, affect the very heart of Christian institutions. Christianity is no longer the same when masculine images of God are suspected to be sexist. Christianity is no longer the same when women renounce their belonging to the church out of repugnance. Christianity is no longer the same*

in the light of feminist interpretations of the Bible and feminist theological perspectives. Christianity is no longer the same when women are in search of their freedom, expressed today throughout the world in so many different ways.

The God of Jesus

Jesus of Nazareth was educated about the God of his parents, and that God was conceived, imagined and contemplated as a man, as a male. Nevertheless, in Jesus' attitudes and messages there are what many authors consider to be values associated with a more "feminine" type of culture: care, compassion, feelings, intuition, spontaneity…

An interesting observation is that in two of his parables Jesus uses women as images of how God acts. In the parable of the leaven (Luke 13,21) he tells of what happens with the Kingdom of God: just a small pinch of leaven is capable of fermenting the whole mass of dough, and the person who gets the process going is a woman. He also speaks of how God cares for all his children, comparing God to a shepherd who at great risk seeks out the lost sheep. He then immediately "feminizes" the comparison by saying that God was also like a woman who anxiously searches for the coin she has lost (Luke 15,8-10).

Such comparisons must have been surprising for Jesus' audience, accustomed to a religious culture in which God was of the masculine gender and women were totally discriminated against in the practices, rites and symbols of the religion. By comparing God's joyful feelings with those of a shepherd who finds his lost sheep or with those of a woman who finds her lost coin, Jesus broadened the image of God. He spoke of a God who is revealed in both men and women when they truly care for life.

Another world is possible, another God is possible

At the end of the research that produced the magnificent book *The Myth of the Goddess*, the authors state: *We reach the conclusion that the feminine principle, as a valid expression of the holiness and unity of life, has been lost for the last four thousand years. This principle was originally manifest in mythological history as "the goddess", and in cultural history it appears in the values associated with spontaneity, feeling, instinct and intuition.*

Nowadays there is not, formally speaking, any feminine dimension in the Judeo-Christian mythology of divinity. Our culture is based on the image of a masculine god who is situated beyond creation and orders all things from outside, instead of being in the interior of creation, as were the mother goddesses who came before him. The inevitable result of such a situation is a disequilibrium between the masculine and the feminine principles, which brings with it serious consequences for the way in which we build our world and the way we live in it.

Because we want to build another world and live in it in a different way, we believe that the time has come, and we are now in it, when the feminine, maternal face of God should shine forth once again. We believe that for another world to be possible, another God has to be possible. And although God has an infinity of names and cannot be contained in any word, that other possible God, the God we need in our world of today, has a woman's face. That is some of the best news that Jesus of

Nazareth gives us in this his second coming to earth. We receive it from the hands of Rachel Perez, special correspondent for Emisoras Latinas, and we pass it on to you. Take care of it, and pass it on to others: it is a precious pearl.