

June 18, 2008

His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI  
Apostolic Palace  
Vatican City

Your Holiness,

It never occurred to me until now to forward my work to the Vatican because it is so unorthodox. But I recently discovered you gave a sermon last year, in which you reportedly said:

*According to John, Jesus died on the Cross at the very moment when the Passover lambs were being sacrificed in the temple. The death of Jesus and the sacrifice of the lambs coincided.*

*However, this means that he must have died the day before Easter and could not, therefore, have celebrated the Passover meal in person - this, at any rate, is how it appears.*

*According to the three Synoptic Gospels, the Last Supper of Jesus was instead a Passover meal into whose traditional form he integrated the innovation of the gift of his Body and Blood.*

*This contradiction seemed unsolvable until a few years ago. The majority of exegetes were of the opinion that John was reluctant to tell us the true historical date of Jesus's death, but rather chose a symbolic date to highlight the deeper truth: Jesus is the new, true Lamb who poured out his Blood for us all.*

*In the meantime, the discovery of the [Dead Sea] Scrolls at Qumran has led us to a possible and convincing solution which, although it is not yet accepted by everyone, is a highly plausible hypothesis. We can now say that John's account is historically precise.*

*Jesus truly shed his blood on the eve of Easter at the time of the immolation of the lambs.*

*In all likelihood, however, he celebrated the Passover with his disciples in accordance with the Qumran calendar, hence, at least one day earlier; he celebrated it without a lamb, like the Qumran community which did not recognize Herod's temple and was waiting for the new temple.<sup>1</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> Homily given Holy Thursday, 5 April 2007 at Basilica of St. John Lateran; emphasis mine.

Evidently you entertain the possibility that Jesus and his disciples may have been associated with the Qumran community, whom most learned scholars have identified as the Essenes. That being the case, I think you will be interested in my new book, *Jesus the Wicked Priest: How Christianity Was Born of an Essene Schism*.

Enclosed, please find a copy of my book, plus a cover letter and summary I recently sent to many of the prominent Dead Sea Scrolls and Historical Jesus scholars. Some of these scholars have already been working with me; others are understandably resistant to my work given the highly controversial nature of the Jesus as Wicked Priest theory, and how difficult it would be for many of these scholars to reverse positions even if they wanted to.

I understand you still hold a chair at Tübingen. Please note in my summary that my DSS restoration is based primarily on the Herodian/Essene exegesis by the late Otto Betz of Tübingen. Enclosed you will also find a photocopy of a hand written letter from Betz where I was fortunate enough to correspond with him before he died. Unfortunately you will see that Betz was unable to take the Jesus as Wicked Priest theory seriously due to the fact that Australian scholar Barbara Thiering originated it; Betz, like most DSS scholars, considered Thiering's methodology flawed. I believe I have corrected many of the flaws in Thiering's methodology, and have now grounded the Jesus as Wicked Priest theory on the work on the main body of DSS scholars, especially those responsible for the mainstream Essene hypothesis.

The reason I'm bringing my work to your attention is that I believe my Essene/scribe identification holds enormous potential for further study, and I'm respectfully requesting your help in encouraging other Christian scholars to take up my work as soon as possible. That is, by completing Betz's Herodian/Essene exegesis, I was able to identify the Essenes as the "scribes" of the New Testament, and in so doing interrelate the study of the New Testament and Dead Sea Scrolls in ways heretofore unimaginable. Now when one reads of the scribes—who together with the Pharisees were Jesus's principle enemies in the Gospel narratives—the Dead Sea Scrolls hold the promise of revealing to us a much more detailed picture: revealing the doctrinal similarities and differences they had with Jesus; revealing why they had him crucified. Simply put, I believe the Dead Sea Scrolls have now become a significant source of exegetical information to help all Christians understand and teach the authentic gospel. And given the state of turmoil in the world, Lord knows we need all the help we can get.

Christ's Peace,

/s  
Marvin Vining

/enclosures

cc: Fr. Emile Puech and Hermann Lichtenberger (Fr. Puech is your senior DSS archeologist and Lichtenberger was Betz's close friend and colleague)