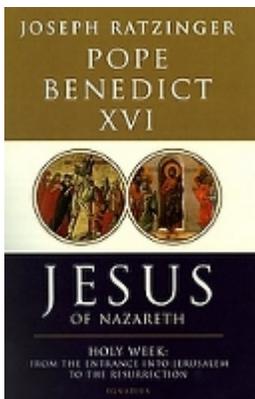


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New book confirms: Benedict XVI is his own best spokesperson

by John L. Allen Jr.



ANALYSIS

One keen irony about the papacy of Benedict XVI is that while the Vatican regime over which he presides has sometimes come off as ham-fisted in terms of public relations, the pope himself is almost universally acknowledged as a gifted communicator.

A veteran theologian and teacher, Benedict can express complex theological ideas in crystalline sentences that don't require a Ph.D. to grasp, and he has a knack for phrasing the Christian message in positive terms -- what I've called his "Affirmative Orthodoxy."

In the old days, a pope would say or do something controversial, and then his aides would smooth things over. More recently, it's actually been the pope who gets the Vatican back on message after someone else has put his foot in his mouth. (This, by the way, should not be taken as a criticism of Benedict's official spokesperson, Jesuit Fr. Federico Lombardi, who does a heroic job under the circumstances.)

We've had another example of that dynamic in recent days with the release of volume two of Benedict's book *Jesus of Nazareth* (published in the United States by Ignatius Press.)

Excerpts released last week earned Benedict XVI positive ink for his acknowledgment that "the Jews" are not responsible for the death of Christ. As of today, the full text of *Jesus of Nazareth: Holy Week* is available, and it's likely to cement the impression that Benedict XVI is his own best spokesperson.

In terms of news value, perhaps the biggest flash is another papal olive branch to Judaism: Not only should Christians not blame Jews for the death of Jesus, Benedict says, but Christians also shouldn't be trying to convert them.

The book is drawing positive reviews not just from Catholics, but Protestants and Jews as well.

In a conference call with reporters organized by Ignatius Press, Protestant Biblical scholar Craig Evans called the second volume of *Jesus of Nazareth* "a remarkable achievement" and "the best book on Jesus I've read in many years."

To read John Allen's full analysis, see: New book confirms: **Benedict XVI is his own best spokesperson**

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