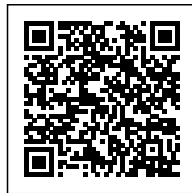


# ALAIN DE BENOIST AND JESUS: MANUFACTURING MISUNDERSTANDING

*Posted on January 1, 2022 by Brother Renaud Silly, OP*



Communism declined and metamorphosed into secularized post-Christianity: "[the last Marxist-Leninist will be a Breton rector.](#)" The contamination of the ideas of the Left among its opponents is inversely proportional to the decrease of the social base on which it is based, which their application has the effect of destroying.

After a few decades of preachiness, the Left in France had as its spokesmen the heirs of [Albert de Mun](#) and a rallying Catholicism. It is a movement classified, rightly or wrongly, on the right of the parliamentary spectrum that today assumes the thankless task of defending the law of 1905, with shaky and quavering voices that its leaders can hardly get out when they reluctantly mention the Church of Christ.

At a time when the Left is advocating the breakdown of equality through affirmative action, the determination of individuals by race according to the decolonial agenda, and orchestrating the Sovietization of knowledge with the help of a sociology that hunts down elitism under its various disguises, it seems that the old Third Republic rationalism has taken refuge in the work of Mr. Alain de Benoist (hereafter, "A."), founder of the New Right. His latest volume, [L'homme qui n'avait pas de père – le dossier Jésus](#) (*The Man Who Had No Father - The Jesus File*), delivers a chemically pure synthesis, which seems to have been sublimated in the lonely conservatory where A. has slowly distilled it.

## A Problem Of Methodology

It would be dishonest not to take *The Jesus File* seriously. Certainly, A. cannot himself discuss the ancient sources on Jesus; this is quickly spotted by transliterations of the Greek that are almost always faulty when they contain some pitfall. The book is therefore a huge compilation of secondary literature—nearly 1000 pages. But on this particular point, the breadth of its information is to be commended. The author quotes hundreds of scholars. His bibliography in English, German and French is very up-to-date; he is not simply content with the latest titles, but can trace the genealogy of an exegetical opinion back to its precursors.

Since A. does not have access to the sources, it is the use he makes of secondary literature that poses a problem. Not having proved his scientific authority in the subjects he has dealt with, he solicits that of others in order to produce a synthesis thus endowed with a borrowed credibility. This is the fundamental weakness of the book. The number of proofs provided by A. decreases as he gathers

clues in huge bundles, not always consistent. Whenever he needs to come to a conclusion, he is forced to deal with the the problem of authority which is lacking in his varied panoply. Such is the way that the entire book is written.

Some examples among so many. To prove that the virginal conception of Jesus and his divine filiation developed independently in the tradition, A. quotes "Jacques Bernard, former professor at the Catholic Institute of Lille," or "Joseph Ratzinger, the future pope Benedict XVI" (p. 611). The age of 33 lent to Jesus on the day of his death corresponds to "the perfect age of the hero who disappeared in full maturity; it is the age of Alexander the Great at his death," and A. quotes "Michel Quesnel, professor at the Catholic Institute of Paris" (p. 503). The existence of Jesus' uterine brothers is asserted by resorting to "John P. Meier, a priest of the Archdiocese of New York and professor of New Testament studies at the Catholic University of America in Washington; François Refoulé, who directed the École Biblique de Jérusalem from 1982 to 1984; Maurice Sachot, a former professor at the Faculty of Catholic Theology;" and thrown in also are Jacques Duquesne and Jean-Claude Barreau (p. 394).

Note: it is only for Catholics that A. sees fit to leave out their university degrees. The precaution seems superfluous for Protestants or agnostics. No doubt the practice of free examination for some, of free thought for others, protects them enough against the ever-recurring suspicion of practicing a confessional or biased exegesis. For Catholics, the only way to portray them is to display their institutional positions. Moreover, when A. quotes Catholic authors without mentioning their academic pedigree, one can expect some very salty bondieuserie, which throws ridicule on the particular author. The great René Laurentin, Father Marie-Joseph Ollivier, this or that Father of the Church, are all at the expense of this rationalist prejudice which discredits a priori their words (cf. p. 353).

### **An Exemplary Case: Tacitus**

This borrowed science, spread out over many pages, is based on a criterion of method which "consists in deconstructing, as any truly scientific investigation does, a false image of its object." It is this science which is asked to provide facts independent of the subjective prejudice of faith. However, we can illustrate the defective handling of this science in *The Jesus File* from a case in point: Tacitus' account of Nero's persecution.

Having quoted the Latin historian (p. 129), A. immediately starts to point out the difficulties Tacitus poses, even before asking himself what Tacitus meant. Thus, he reduces the statement to a set of

isolated elements, violently torn from the scriptural body in which they were harmoniously inserted. These scattered, disjointed pieces, this panting flesh to which the statement has been reduced, no longer maintain with their environment the solid and living links that make them resist the arbitrariness of an imputed meaning. The trick is played so that the critic imposes the meaning as he pleases, drawing randomly from epigraphy, ancient sources, and his imagination. Not surprisingly, the statement thus "reconstituted" has become a tissue of contradictions. Let us judge the evidence.

Tacitus defines Christians as taking their name from "Christ who, under the principate of Tiberius, was executed by the procurator Pontius Pilate". The very first remark of A. is to point out that Pilate was not procurator (*epitropos*), but prefect (*eparchos*), as appears from a famous contemporary inscription found in Caesarea in Palestine. This anachronism is enough for the author to anticipate the end of his demonstration; namely, that the text "was interpolated in the fifteenth century (sic.), at a time when everyone thought that Pontius Pilate had been procurator" (p. 130).

By the way, it was not until the end of the Middle Ages that everyone popularly attributed to Pilate a title he did not have. Philo of Alexandria, his contemporary, and Flavius Josephus around 75 also give Pilate the title of procurator/*epitropos*. It is certain that Pilate bore the official title of prefect/*eparchos*, a magistracy that was mainly military. But it is no less certain that he also exercised a civil administration over the imperial province that Judea had become from the year 6 AD. The two magistracies being often entrusted to the same persons, the governors of Judea officially took the title of procurators/*epitropoi* starting in the reign of Claudius, thus after Pilate.

Tacitus certainly presents an anachronistic title, but the explanation by a fifteenth-century interpolator is surely not the first to be considered. Tacitus may have voluntarily adapted the title to the one in use at the time. But it is more likely that he is quoting Christian documents. The fact is not implausible, contrary to what A. asserts (p. 132), since Tacitus was among the [Quindecimviri sacris faciundis](#) (Annals XI, 11), a priestly college responsible for the supervision of foreign cults in Rome. No magistrate of the city was in a better position than he to have access to information about the Christians. He would even have seriously failed in his duty if he had not had reliable and precise information on them. His information corresponded exactly to that which could have motivated their possession by a Roman magistrate: foreign cults were considered not according to the content of their beliefs, but according to the disturbance they could cause to public order.

It is in administrative and police terms that Tacitus depicts Christianity: his allusion to the execution of

Christ is juridical, to recall the legal intervention of Pilate, the magistrate in charge of enforcing the *pax romana*. In Rome, Tacitus attaches such contempt to the name of Christian that it seems to be worth an indictment—“*christianos*” *appellabat*; these form a detestable *superstitio*—that is to say, in official language, a sect covering up for criminal acts. The way in which Tacitus links Christ and the Christians is another characteristic of the non-Christian sources, all of which point to the strong attachment of the disciples to their master.

In short, Tacitus' text on the persecution of the Christians of Rome under Nero is perfectly coherent, in its outward approach to a phenomenon that he does not understand; or, rather analyzes according to the concerns of a Roman magistrate. This global understanding of Tacitus allows us to grasp why he speaks of the Christians tortured by Nero as an “immense multitude”: he does not proceed to a count, but allows himself a hyperbole that betrays his own fear, that of a wealthy man in front of the threatening and indistinct mass formed by the human mob populating the [Suburra](#) or the [Velabro](#), followers of oriental divinities and practicing morals that would be abhorrent to a senator of good birth. But the fractional method of A. forbids him to understand this nuance. For him, “immense multitude” means “a great number of Christians.” Since they did not exist in Rome in 64, A. postulates an interpolation, dating from a time when they did. Believing that he has a solid argument, A. tries to squeeze all the juice of it: if Nero's persecution had concerned a large number of Christians, one would find traces of that in the satirists, but they do not appear, etc. Always the reduction of the source to a few material elements.

This pointillist method is a forge of misunderstandings. The accumulation of secondary literature does not change anything. He who embraces too much embraces badly. The author triumphantly ends his section on Roman historians, having quoted dozens of modern authors, with a huge error: “the texts of Pliny the Younger, Tacitus and Suetonius that we have at our disposal tell us practically nothing about Jesus” (p. 136). This is not true. The first Latin authors approach Christianity and its founder from the outside, certainly. But they provide valuable information about certain distinctive features of the Church founded by Christ, which must be appreciated by comparing them with the mental revolution wrought by Him. In reality, A's scientific prejudice does not seek to understand the Jesus phenomenon, but to satisfy its definition of ideal objectivity through deconstruction.

## **Alain de Benoist's Project**

Once the object of study has been dissolved into an aggregate of primary elements, one would expect

them to be reconstituted in a new form, as with fresh clay. A. however does not risk it. After having conscientiously atomized all the statements of the Gospels that had the misfortune to fall into his hands, he stops in the middle of this valley of dry bones that will not be resurrected. He did not even think it appropriate to write a conclusion. A sentence in the Introduction takes the place of one, in which one thought one could only read a *captatio benevolentiae* calling for prudence: "What do we know today that is really certain about Jesus? The answer is simple: very little" (p. 1). The next 1000 pages will add nothing to this. Thousands of opinions and not a single truth.

Does this book, which is entirely based on the deconstruction of its subject, actually have any overall project? It seems to us that it is precisely this emptiness, this nothingness to which the investigation wants to bring the Jesus of history. The proof of this is the title of the book ("The man who had no father"); the final chapter on Jesus ("An illegitimate child" p. 771-862) which is in fact its conclusion. And, finally, the total absence of interest, which is surprising in such a large book, in the almost unique means by which Jesus exerted his impact: his word. A. will claim that his critique strikes down as inauthentic just about every statement attributed to Jesus in the Gospels. Like the notes on Tacitus or Pliny, nothing can be drawn from them.

However, there is only one word of Jesus which A. considers authentic enough to devote an in-depth exegesis to it: the adultery of which the one who repudiated his first wife to marry another is guilty (cf. Mk 10:11-12). True to his method of placing polemical statements in the mouths of foreign authorities, the author quotes an American polygrapher, Donald Harman Akenson: "Jesus' very strict views on divorce, as reported in the Synoptic Gospels, stand in sharp contrast to his usual teaching and could refer to a personal uneasiness related to his illegitimacy" (p. 474). The curse on pregnant women (Mk 13:14-17) is interpreted as an absolute statement of Jesus, which Mark would have watered down by attributing it only to a particular situation. The preaching of the Gospel would thus float in a "Gnostic" atmosphere (p. 469).

From then on, a certain overall coherence emerges. As an illegitimate child, Jesus would have sublimated his dubious origin by preaching an immaterial, immaculate birth, a celestial paternity and by claiming it first of all for himself. He would have refused the flesh to tear himself away from the congenital malaise in which his bastardy would have locked him. By resentment, he would have instilled in the morals the shame of the flesh and sexual repression. Paul and the Church (cf. p. 476-480) would have extended his teaching by the morbid exaltation of virginity. One understands why A. wants to disjoin the traditions on the messianic and divine filiation of Jesus, and on his virginal conception: He

holds them to be so many ways, contradictory according to him, of diverting attention from Jesus' illegitimacy. The Christian dogma, the sublime composition of the Gospels, the beginning of a tradition, are there to make us forget an inglorious truth.

Christianity is a culturally sublime phenomenon—A. is far from denying it—which eludes the nothingness of its origin in a man who had no father and whose itinerary resembles the reveries of the Foundling. This conclusion is absurd, of course. It takes literally much later Jewish polemics, towards which A.'s credulity belies his hypercriticism for once. It is based on a single misunderstood word of Jesus and on an arbitrary reconstruction of his origin. Finally, it attributes all of Jesus' effectiveness to a guilt-ridden nihilism that is absolutely belied by the biography of Jesus, who "was never anything but 'yes'. All the promises of God found their yes in his person" (2 Cor 1:19).

### **Jesus Is Deprived Of His Words**

"*Jesus autem tacebat*" ("Jesus was silent", Mt 26, 63). *The Jesus File*: where Jesus observes a stubborn silence. Not a whisper is heard from the one to whom Peter said, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed and known that you are the holy one of God" (Jn 6:68), and who declared, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not" (Mk 13:31). Without his words, Jesus is inaudible. In fact, all of Jesus' effectiveness comes through his words.

The authentic tradition, the dogmas, are nothing other than the efforts made to understand what he had said. Quoting Ps 109/110, he says that the Messiah is Son of David and prior to David (cf. Mk 12:35-37). Much later, the Christology of Chalcedon defining a person in two natures results from the maturation of this statement (and of many others) made one day very consciously by Jesus on the Temple square. His pre-existence is affirmed by himself when he says "I have come to..." (cf. Mt 10:34-35; Lk 12:49; Jn 9:39; Mk 10:45, etc.).

But there is no one deaf than the one who does not want to hear. In *The Jesus File*, the logos of logic silences the Logos of the Prologue. The madness—in Greek *alogia*, literally, "absence of the Logos"—is not to have lost one's reason; it is to have retained only one's reason. Not a single word of Christ crosses this bleak desert, similar to "the silence of the ether, when the wooded valley silenced its foliage and not a single animal cry was heard" (8). Jesus is gagged like "the voiceless Lamb that is led to the slaughter and did not open its mouth" (Is 53:7). But "the stones will cry out" (Lk 19:40). Beginning with those of the conceptual tomb in which Adam covers his ears so as not to hear God, who says: "Where

are you?"

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*Brother Renaud Silly is a Dominican who recently oversaw and edited [Dictionnaire Jésus](#) (the Jesus Dictionary), the major work recently published by the [École Biblique de Jérusalem](#) and Éditions Bouquins. This article comes to us through the kind courtesy of [La Nef](#).*

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*[Featured image](#): "The Incredulity of Saint Thomas," by Matthias Stom, painted ca. 1641-1649.*



