

# Salvation is from the Jews

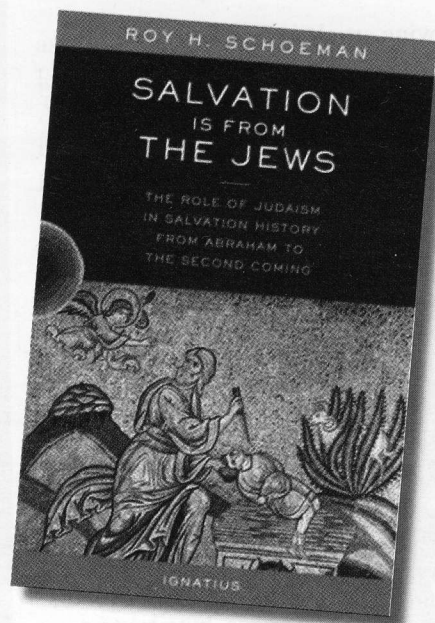
Ignatius Press, 2003, 392pp.

by Roy Schoeman

reviewed by Alice von Hildebrand

Agged nineteen, Augustine read Cicero's *Hortensius*: he writes in his *Confessions* that this book had a profound effect upon him. "[W]ith incredible ardor of heart, I desired undying wisdom." From time to time, God grants us a work that will open new vistas, deepen our faith and touch our hearts by inviting us to see the beauty of God's plan of salvation. Roy Schoeman's *Salvation is from the Jews* is such a work, since it sheds admirable light on the all-important question – salvation – and the role that God has assigned the chosen people. I do not know another work that illumines as powerfully the mystery of God's plan of love in choosing the Jews as His instrument to bring about the birth of the Messiah. Liberalism, willful ignorance and prejudice have so often obscured the fact that the Catholic Church is post-messianic Judaism. This book is a clarion call for the author's blood brothers whose hearts have been hardened, whose eyes have been blinded, whose ears have been blocked, preventing them from adoring the Savior born of a Jewish Virgin, a descendent of David, fulfilling all the prophesies of the Old Testament. This book is also a call for the numerous Catholics affected by "ecumenitis" who believe that God does not want His people to enter the Holy Ark of the Church, as if the Chosen People were to be excluded from the fullness of Truth.

This book was triggered by an extraordinary religious experience that led a Jew viscerally opposed to anything Christian to fall on his



knees and adore Christ, the King of the Jews. Schoeman sheds an admirable light on the role of the chosen people in the economy of salvation, on their continued, mysterious importance – for God's gifts are irrevocable – until the Second Coming.

Schoeman was tortured by what Kierkegaard calls "the sickness unto death," namely, despair. Brilliantly successful, having achieved without much effort what he wanted to do, a ski champion who loved racing down the slopes in blinding snowstorms protected by some uncanny spirit, he found himself at the bottom of a spiritual slope, incapable of ascending.

One day, while taking a lonely walk along the shore of Cape Cod, despairing of the meaninglessness of his "successful" life, having forfeited "all hope of ascent" (Dante, *Inferno*, Canto I, 54), he too, like Saul (St. Paul), was "struck down," for suddenly "he found himself in heaven" and gained the conviction that he was infinitely loved by God. He who had felt unloved was given a

vision of his entire life and understood that all things that had happened to him were dictated by God's love. Overwhelmed, he declared his readiness to endorse any religion... except Christianity. He, a Jew, was ready to accept Buddha, Krishna, Apollo, but ironically he rejected Christ, the King of the Jews. Having made this restriction, like Saul he asked the name of the One addressing him. But while Saul had been open to any answer, Schoeman had closed his heart to one possibility: that Christ Himself was addressing him. The punishment was immediate: silence.

But He who had called him by name did not give up, and sent his Virgin Mother – as He had done to the early nineteenth-century Jewish convert, Alphonse Ratisbonne. She revealed her dazzling beauty in a dream. Her beauty wounded his heart, and he fell in love with her.

He then knew immediately that the voice he had heard on the beach a year before was the voice of Christ.

But he had

to make a long detour before he entered the Holy Ark of the Church. Harvard in the late 1980s was (and probably still is) in the throes of total spiritual confusion. Oriental spirituality, anthroposophy, New Age, "ecumenitis" – any aberration – was warmly welcome; truth alone was suspicious. He had to struggle every step of the way, always guided by the Virgin Mary who, like a mother, kept protecting him from falling into the numerous traps that littered his path. When finally, having freed himself from a web of errors, he gained the conviction that the fullness of revealed truth was the exclusive privilege of the Roman Catholic Church – the

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obvious fulfillment of Judaism – his difficulties were still not at an end. He was turned down for baptism several times by priests (even by the superior of a great religious order) and told that he need not be baptized. He should, instead, strive to be a better Jew. He was finally received into the Holy Church on January 5, 1992, four and a half years after his extraordinary experience on the sands of Cape Cod.

This book is of crucial importance today. It is clearly a response to a call in this age of confusion, in which endless “dialogues” often end in obscuring the crucial link between the chosen people and Roman Catholicism. Whereas many liberal Catholics came to the conclusion that Jews need not enter the Church – their own way to God being just as valid – Schoe-

man shows powerfully that Roman Catholicism is the fulfillment of the Old Testament. To refuse to share with God’s chosen people the treasures that the Messiah brought to the world is a sin against charity: for, by birthright, they belong to the Church. The key thesis of the author is that when a Jew is baptized, far from abandoning Judaism, he is the religious Jew *par excellence*. He is the “remnant” chosen by grace.

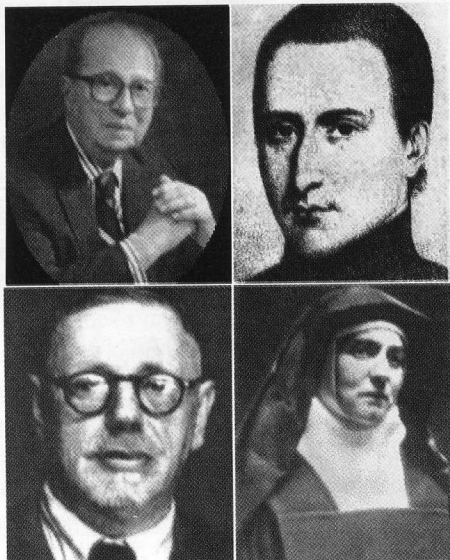
In a masterful chapter that has the convincing precision of a Beethoven

symphony, and the sober ardor of truth, Schoeman etches the Jewish conception of Messianism. Another particularly poignant chapter is entitled, “Judaism and the Holocaust.” Today there are essentially two competing views that attempt to explain this epic tragedy: either God betrayed and abandoned His people, breaking

His covenant (the position adopted by Elie Wiesel), or God is either non-existent or impotent. Neither alternative is, of course, true; but to reach the truth requires a theology of suffering deeper than that of the Old Testament. It is only the “science of the cross” (Edith Stein) – that is, the discovery and acceptance of the redemptive value of suffering – that can illumine this excruciating question. Redemptive suffering was embraced by St. Edith Stein who, upon her arrest

at the convent in Echt (knowing that she was going to be sacrificed), said to her sister, Rosa: “Let us go for our people.” This chapter is so gripping that it requires several meditative readings.

A scholarly presentation of the roots of anti-Semitism follows. Schoeman demonstrates that the poisonous weeds of this evil philosophy did not begin with Nazism. He traces their origin to vicious ideas that had been spreading since the nineteenth century. It is followed by another



Some famous Jewish converts - from the top left - Mortimer Adler, Father Alfonse Ratisbonne, Israel Zolli (formerly the Chief Rabbi of Rome during WWII), and Edith Stein.

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chapter that makes for painful reading and shows the closeness between Nazism and the Muslim world in the hatred of the Jews – which is, in the end, a hatred of Christ Himself. Anti-Semitism and the Holocaust were the first steps toward contemporary anti-Catholicism.

The Jew entering the Catholic Church is not endorsing a new religion; he professes, rather, his faithfulness to Judaism in the deepest sense of the word. The moment divine grace unlocks the door that the hardening of Jewish hearts had shut, Jews find themselves home.

I started this book review with a reference to St. Augustine’s *Confessions*. I shall end it with the same: *tolle, lege.* ✠



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