

**ENDTIME ISSUES NEWSLETTER No. 120:  
“The ‘Christian’ Theology of Anti-Semitism”  
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A sad chapter in the history of the Christian Church is the development of the “Christian” theology of contempt for the Jews as a people and for Judaism as a religion. For the past two millennia theological anti-Judaism and ethnic anti-Semitism have plagued the Christian Church. Church councils have often condemned the Jews as a cursed people, destined to live in perpetual servitude.

The theology of contempt for the Jews has inspired fanatical Christians to prove God right by murdering countless Jews throughout Europe, especially at Easter time, following the performance of medieval Passion Plays. The slaughter of the Jews that followed Passion Plays became so frightening, that both civil and ecclesiastical authorities forbade the production of Passion Plays in such cities as Freiburg in 1338, Frankfurt in 1469, Rome in 1539, Paris in 1548, and Strassburg in 1549.

In recent years, the Second Vatican Council, the Pope himself, and numerous Protestant leaders, have apologized for the crimes committed by zealous Christians against the Jews as a people. They have strongly condemned the historical belief that the Jews are under a perpetual curse for their collective guilt of killing Christ.

In our post-holocaust world considerable progress has been made in uprooting the deep-seated belief that the Jews are a wicked people, under God’s curse for killing Christ. But in spite of the progress, there are still those who wish to uncritically perpetrate the sins of the past. An example, is Mel Gibson’s movie *The Passion of the Christ*, where the Jews are portrayed throughout the movie as mean, sadistic, with angry looks and bad teeth. There are no shots in the movie of the multitudes of Jews, who, according to the Gospel, followed Jesus to Golgotha, grieving and sorely lamenting His suffering and death (Luke 23:46-47).

The evil appearance of Jews in *The Passion*, is heightened by their clothing that differentiates them from Christ’s followers. Prof. Alan F.

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Segal observes that “The costuming and the make up of this film make clear that the Jesus and the disciples of this film are not Jews. The Jews in this film wear caps on their heads; they wear tatillim (i. e. prayer shawl worn by male Jews); they are portrayed in caricature, like medieval woodcut. It seems unlikely that Jews of this period dressed in quite this way, as many of the articles of Jewish worship were still functional articles of clothing in the first century. But that is irrelevant for our purposes. The important thing to note is that these articles which define the Jewish community in this film are not worn by Jesus or any of His followers. The result is the distinct impression that Jesus and his followers are quite different from the Jews who oppose His ministry with supernatural evil intentions.”<sup>1</sup>

Gibson’s arbitrary distinction between the appearance of the Jews and that of Christ’s followers, reflect his intent to stigmatize the Jews collectively as Christ’s killers. The historical reality is that Judeo-Christians did not emerge as a distinct ethnic and religious people until much later. At the time of Jesus and during the time of the Apostolic church, there was no difference between the appearance of believing-Jews and that of unbelieving-Jews. Both looked and lived as Jews. A clear indication is the introduction of a special the malediction of the Christians in the worship service of the synagogue toward the end of the first century. Its purpose was to identify and expel from the service those Jews who believed in Christ.<sup>2</sup>

This essay is excerpted from chapter 2 of my forthcoming book on *THE PASSION OF CHRIST IN SCRIPTURE AND HISTORY*. The aim of this study is to help people with an inquiring mind to understand how the theology of contempt for the Jews originated and the role that the Passion Plays have played during the past seven centuries in promoting unbiblical beliefs and practices, which are based more on hate for the Jews than love for Jesus Christ.

The historical legacy of the “Christian” theology of contempt for the Jews, is still evident today, not only in the change from Sabbath to Sunday (as documented in my dissertation *From Sabbath to Sunday*), but also in the development of dispensationalism—a religious system that teaches that God favors the Church at the expenses of the Jews. After the

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Church is secretly raptured to heaven, God will pour out the last seven plagues especially upon the Jews who will suffer for their sins like never before.

Modern dispensationalism is generally traced back to the teaching of John Nelson Darby (1800-1882), an Anglican preacher who broke away from his church and became the leader of a Christian group called the “Plymouth Brethren.” Darby rejected the idea of the unity of the covenants, teaching instead that God’s dealing with the Jews is different from His dealing with the Church. Simply stated, the Jews are under a divine curse for killing Christ, and consequently they will be humiliated not only in this world, but also in the world to come.

Surprisingly, dispensationalism is widely accepted today by most Evangelical churches. This may partly explain why *The Passion* is especially popular among Evangelical Christians. Best-sellers like *The Late Great Planet Earth* and the recent *Left Behind* series, are contributing to popularize the endtime dispensational scenario. The vast majority of evangelicals believe, for example, in the *Secret Rapture*, without realizing that such belief derives not from Scripture, but from the “Christian” theology of contempt for the Jews. It is a theology that ultimately makes God guilty of discriminatory practices by favoring the Christians over the Jews.

You should find this essay informative and enlightening. Take time to read it leisurely. It will help you to see how the theology of contempt for the Jews is leading many unsuspecting Evangelicals to accept as biblical truths, what in reality are ecclesiastical heresies.

### **Reactions to the Last Endtime Issues Newsletters**

The last newsletter on “The Portrayal and Impersonation of Christ,” generated a good number of perceptive responses from Adventist and non-Adventist scholars and church leaders. Let me share with you two comments. The first is from Dr. Humberto Rasi, who has served until his recent retirement as Director of the Department of Education of the SDA General Conference. He is still actively involved in a number of projects, including the editorial responsibility of the *DIALOGUE* magazine, published in several languages for college and university students worldwide. Dr. Rasi wrote:

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Dear Sam,

Your recent electronic essay regarding the risks of moving from worship to dramatization is right on target. I see this as part of the shift from worship to spectacle that has been going on for some time among us.

We now think that in Sabbath worship the actor is the pastor and his associates in the program, the prompter the Holy Spirit, and we, the members, the audience. Many of us go to church to be entertained. However, the biblical model of worship is that the actors are the members assembled to worship, the audience is God Almighty, and the prompters are the Scriptures, the Holy Spirit and the pastor.

Some years ago I read a substantial book by Jacques Ellul, translated into English with the title of *The Humiliation of the Word*. Ellul indicates that throughout the Scriptures there are warnings against the emphasis on images in worship. He mentioned the contrast between the written words that God gave to Moses and the image that his brother Aaron crafted to worship, with its sad results.

Ellul points out that the Bible always privileges the word over the image. God speaks to His people. He incarnates among us as the Word. From the moment of Creation, one can find a strong connection between rationality and language in the human make up. Since language always requires decoding, either from sounds or from marks on clay or paper, our minds and values can act as filters. Images, and especially moving images, always bypass this filter and the rational controls, overwhelming our senses and awaking raw emotions.

During the Church reforms of the 12th and 13th Centuries, a French order pioneered the effort to move from mass/preaching to images and stained windows, arguing that the populace needed to be shown rather than preached at. Hence the dramatic increase of passion plays, sculptures and stained glass windows in Europe.

Another fascinating book published in the 1980s, *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, by Neil Postman, outlines in painful details the negative effect of TV, film, and videos on students in particular and on society at large,

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creating a lazy-headed mass unable to think critically and being swayed by mere appearances and emotions.

Warm regards,

Humberto M. Rasi, Ph.D.

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## **Second Commandment and PowerPoint Slides**

A second type of comments came from several subscribers, including some pastors and Bible teachers. They have asked me to explain how I reconcile the Second Commandment’s condemnation of the visual representation of the Deity, with the use of religious art, especially the pictures that I use in my own PowerPoint presentations. This is a legitimate question that I need to address.

It is true that there is a fine line between visual representations of Christ used for illustrating biblical truths, and pictures used as icon for worship purpose. Yet there is a difference between the two—a difference which I will attempt to explain as best as I can.

Having lived the first 20 years of my life in Rome, Italy, I have witnessed on countless occasions devout Catholics kneeling or praying in front of an image or statue of Mary, Christ, or the Saints. The function of such images or statues is not to illustrate biblical truths, but to help the worshipper form a mental image of the person addressed in prayer. This is why usually Catholics pray with their eyes open looking at the picture of Christ, Mary, or the saints. The pictures help them to conceptualize the person they are addressing in prayer or worship.

Catholics make a distinction between the use of *picture to venerate the saints* and the *pictures used to worship God*. The reverence shown to saints through pictures is called *veneration* (in Greek *dulia*), while the worship offered to God through pictures is called *adoration* (in Greek *latría*).

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The Catholic Church maintains that they do not venerate or worship the images or statues themselves, but the persons represented by them. Thus, the images are not an end in themselves, but a vehicle to conceptualize the saints or Mary being venerated, or the members of the Godhead being adored.

The distinction between the respect shown to the saints—called *veneration*—, and the worship offered to God—called *adoration*, may hold true in the mind of Catholic theologians, but is lost in popular piety. Devout Catholics who pray before an image of Mary or of Christ, hardly know where veneration ends and adoration begins.

The problem in the use of images for venerating the saints or adoring God, is that in both instances images are used as an aid to worship. Their function is not to illustrate biblical truths, but to aid believers in worshipping the persons portrayed in the picture. It is this worship-function of images that is condemned by the Second Commandment, namely, bowing down before images representing divine Beings as a means to worship them.

The few images of Christ that I use in my PowerPoint presentations, do not serve as an aid to worship, but simply to help people remember the biblical truth associated with the pictures. For example, to illustrate the point that “Jesus made the Sabbath a day to love people, not to obey rules,” I place this caption next to a side-picture of Jesus healing the paralytic. The few seconds that the picture appears on the screen, is not designed to invite believers to kneel before that picture of Jesus and worship Him, but simply to remember how Jesus related to the Sabbath.

Gibson portrayal of Christ’s Passion is different because the bloody pictures of Christ’s flagellation and crucifixion, are designed to inspire the worship and devotion of the bleeding Christ portrayed in the movie. In chapter 1 of the forthcoming book I discuss how *Passion Plays* promoted the imitation and promotion of Christ’s sufferings. *Gibson’s movie* has rightly been called an “animated crucifix.” In fact, pictures of Gibson’s crucifixion, even the replica of the nails, are widely sold through numerous websites as icons for worship.

The stunning ~~image~~ *Passion* will leave indelible mental images that will inspire many to worship the Christ portrayed in the movie.

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In an interview Dr. Graham himself stated: “Every time I preach or speak about the Cross, the things I saw on the screen [of *The Passion*] will be on my heart and mind”<sup>4</sup> If a preacher like Billy Graham will be permanently influenced by Gibson’s “animated crucifix,” will not millions of average Christians unfamiliar with the Gospels’ narrative “exchange the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man” (Rom 1:23)?

Some Adventist churches today are placing a large picture of Christ in the chancel above the baptistry. A permanent picture in such location poses two problems. First, it may tempt new converts coming from a Catholic background to worship the Christ portrayed in that picture. Second, it may led the congregation to form a permanent mental image of Christ that will serve as the basis for their private or church worship of Christ. In such instance the image can lead to idolatrous worship.

In an article entitled “Art or Idol,” Dr. Angel Manuel Rodriguez, Director of the Biblical Research Institute of the General Conference of SDA, offers these perceptive comments: “The veneration of images or icons is not part of the Adventist liturgy. We instinctively dislike the veneration of objects that represent God and Christ because it suggests the violation of the second commandment. The veneration of icons is based on church traditions that lack biblical grounding. *It is important for us to examine the display of images in our churches to make sure that we do not give the impression that we are in any way or form venerating images.* It is clear from the Scripture that decorative religious art is not essentially bad. That’s why we feel safe using a significant amount of religious art in our books and literature, and why some of our churches have stained-glass windows with religious motifs. Having an image is not necessarily wrong; after all, we are all living images of God.”<sup>3</sup> I would simply add that the problem is when an image of Christ becomes a sacred icon used as an aid to worship the Lord.

## A THANK YOU NOTE

Thank you also for sharing my newsletters with your friends. As a result of your efforts, I receive an average of 200 new subscriptions every week. Let your friends know that this is a FREE service. To subscribe they only need to email a message to <[sbacchiocchi@biblicalpherspectives.com](mailto:sbacchiocchi@biblicalpherspectives.com)>, saying SUBSCRIBE ME.

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**NEW ANNOUNCEMENTS POLICY**

At the suggestion of several subscribers, I have decided to eliminate the lengthy announcements of my weekend seminars and the special offer of my publications/recordings. These announcements take several pages that clutter the newsletters. Instead, from now I will post in the newsletters ONLY A LIST of the announcements and of the special offers. The details will be posted at my website that you will be able to access simply by clicking on the URL address given. This means that you can access immediately the details of each announcement at my website simply by clicking on the URL address provided in this newsletter.

**LIST OF ANNOUNCEMENTS AND SPECIAL OFFERS**

**HAVE YOU RENTED DISPLAY BOOTHS AT THE 2005 THE GENERAL CONFERENCE SESSION?**

If you have rented two or more display booths at the 2005 General Conference Session in St. Louis, Missouri, I would be glad to pay for two booths if you would kindly offer one of them to me. The reason is that when I sent in my application with the \$700.00 check three weeks ago, Dean Rogers, the Manager, informed me that ALL the commercial display booths, have been already allocated. I can hardly forgive myself for neglecting this matter. If you can offer me one of your booths, I will gladly pay for two of them. Thank you for considering my request.

**THE PASSION OF CHRIST ON 3ABN ON DECEMBER 9, 2004**

3ABN has extended me an official invitation to present the highlights of my forthcoming book *THE PASSION OF CHRIST IN SCRIPTURE AND HISTORY* on Thursday evening, December 9, 2004 during the two hours popular live program. I look forward with great anticipations to this unique opportunity to help viewers around the world to better understand the historical and theological developments of THE PASSION PLAYS. Historically, the Plays have been influenced by Catholic legends and superstitious beliefs foreign to the Bible.

Mel Gibson’s movie on *The Passion of the Christ*, largely follows the traditional Passion Plays by portraying numerous unbiblical scenes

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that subtly promote Catholic teachings. The average viewer does not have the tools necessary to distinguish between the biblical and unbiblical teachings promoted by the movie.

To be able to have the book out by December 9, 2004, I have cancelled the rally scheduled for October 29-30, in Milan, Italy, as well as a rally in New York for November 5-6, 2004. I am working intensively on the manuscript, hoping to have it ready for the printer by November 15 so that the book can be out by December 7, 2004. Remember me in your prayer. In the next newsletters I will give you all the details about the time when this special live program can be viewed in different countries.

### UPCOMING WEEKEND SEMINARS

As a service to our subscribers, I am listing at my website the and the location of the upcoming seminars for the month October 2004. Every Sabbath it is a great pleasure for me to meet subscribers who travel considerable distances to attend the seminars. For a listing of the time and places of my seminars, visit my website at <http://www.biblicalperspectives.com/seminars.html>

### HITACHI PROJECTORS: SPECIAL OCTOBER SALE!!!

If your church or school are looking for a outstanding I projector, especially the forthcoming NET 2004, you will be pleased to learn that the HITACHI Corporation of North America has agreed to offer to our Adventist churches and schools their line of projectors at over 65% discount on the factory suggested retail price. Over 400 Adventist churches and schools have already purchased these outstanding projectors.

**SPECIAL OCTOBER SALE!!! During this month of October, an additional \$100.00 discount is granted on all the HITACHI projectors. This means that until October 31, 2004, your church or school can purchase the 2004 AWARD WINNING HITACHI CP-X328, HIGH RESOLUTION, 2000 lumens for only \$1695.00 (instead of the MSRP \$7,495.00) and the newly released HITACHI CP-S420 2700 lumens for only \$2095.00 (instead of the MSRP \$7,495.00). The price includes three years 24/7 extended warrantee. This is an unprecedented offer!!! After October 31, 2004, the prices will be \$100.00 higher.**

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HITACHI has just come out with two new projectors with lens s and four interchangeable lenses. Their model are HITACHI CP-X1200 3500 lumens and HITACH CP-X1250 4500 lumens. The shift lenses makes it possible to place the projector on a side wall or even on the ceiling behind the beams. The four optional lenses make it possible to place the projector from 10’ to 150’ away from the screen. Call me for details. I am in the process of negotiating a special price for our churches.

Read the rest of the story about the special offer on HITACHI projectors at my website: <http://www.biblicalperspectives.com/projector.html>. If you have a problem accessing my website, just email us your enquiry or call us at (269) 978-6878 or (269) 471-2915. We will be glad to give you all the information about the special HITACHI offer.

### **SPECIAL ONETIME OFFER ON CD-ROMS AND DVD/VIDEO RECORDINGS**

Because of the continuous demand from many countries for CD-ROMS and DVD/VIDEO recordings, we decided to extend the SPECIAL ONE TIME OFFER until October 31, 2004. The TWO CD-ROM contain all my research (over 7000 pages) and all my PowerPoint Lectures. The FIVE DVD DISKS contain 10 live PowerPoint lectures of my SABBATH/ADVENT seminars, that were taped last January by a TV crew at Andrews University.

The special offer is ONLY \$100.00, postage paid, instead of regular price of \$350.00. Read the details at my website: <http://www.biblicalperspectives.com/Promotions/SPECIALPACKAGEOFFER.htm>. If you have a problem ordering the package through my website, just email us your order or call us at (269) 978-6878 or (269) 471-2915. We will be glad to take your order by phone and mail you the package immediately.

### **SPECIAL ONETIME OFFER ON ALL MY 16 VOLUMES**

A number of subscribers who prefer reading books, rather than watching or listening to my recordings, have asked me if I would consider making a special onetime offer on the complete package of my 16 books. I thought that this was a legitimate request.

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**THIS IS THE SPECIAL ONETIME OFFER:** Between now and November 30, 2004, you can order the complete package of all the 16 volumes I have authored on our fundamental Adventist beliefs, for only \$120.00, mailing expenses included, instead of their regular price of \$305.00. This means that you are paying only \$7.50 per book, instead of the regular price of \$20.00 per book.

These 16 volumes represent for 30 years of painstaking research on our fundamental Adventist beliefs. You can see the picture of each book and read sample chapters at my website: If you have a problem ordering the 16 books package through my website, just email us your order or call us at (269) 978-6878 or (269) 471-2915. We will be glad to take your order and mail you the book immediately.

### **THE BEST SDA COMMENTARY ON REVELATION**

Many pastors, Bible teachers, and lay members, have expressed their gratitude for informing them about the best SDA commentary on the Book of Revelation, recently published by Andrews University Press. If you missed the previous announcement, be sure to contact us to order your copy. We will mail it to you immediately.

Much of the prophetic message and mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church derives from the Book of Revelation. Yet until now, most of the Adventist commentaries on Revelation were produced by authors who had a limited understanding of the linguistic, historical, political, and social settings of the book. Finally, our Adventist Church has published a Commentary on the Book of Revelation, that provides a wealth of information needed to unlock the meaning of problematic passages.

The author is Ranko Stefanovic, Ph. D, currently serving as Professor of New Testament at Andrews University. The publisher is Andrews University Press. Prof. Stefanovic spent two years producing this popular version of his doctoral dissertation presented with distinction at the Andrews University Theological Seminary.

You can read the full story at my website: <http://www.biblicalperspectives.com/Promotions/RevelationofJesusChrist.htm>.

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If you have a problem ordering the book through my website, just email us your order or call us at (269) 978-6878 or (269) 471-2915. We will be glad to take your order and mail you the book immediately.

## **AN INTERACTIVE MULTIMEDIA CD-ROM OF THE GREAT CONTROVERSY**

Have you ever wished that you could see the unfolding of the Great Controversy during the history of Christianity? This has been the dream of Gerard Damsteegt, Ph. D., Professor of Church History at our Andrews University Theological Seminary. With the help of competent people who worked with him during the past 8 years and the generous contribution of supporters who believed in this project, Damsteegt has produced a CD-ROM that will thrill your soul and enrich your mind.

The simplest way for me to describe this multimedia CD-ROM is for you to imagine having 100 documentaries compressed in one disk. You are guided through a virtual tour and given the opportunity to click what you want to watch or read. For example, if you want to see the Destruction of Jerusalem, or the Persecution of the Christians, just click, and you can watch factual documentaries. You are in for months of pleasurable learning. Church leaders and Bible teachers in different parts of the world have emailed me messages of appreciation for this incredible multimedia presentation of the Great Controversy experience.

Read the rest of the story at my website: <http://www.biblicalpherspectives.com/Promotions/TheGreatControversyExp.htm>. If you have a problem ordering this marvellous CD-ROM through my website, just email us your order or call us at (269) 978-6878 or (269) 471-2915. We will be glad to take your order and AIRMAIL you immediately this fantastic multimedia interactive CD-ROM.

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**“The ‘Christian’ Theology of Anti-Semitism”****Samuele Bacchiocchi, Ph. D.,****Retired Professor of Theology and Church History,****Andrews University**

The drama of the trial, suffering, and crucifixion of Jesus is central to the Christian message of salvation through Christ’s atoning sacrifice. The interpretation of the role of the Jews in this drama, has been the foundation of the “Christian” theology of contempt toward the Jews.

Throughout the centuries and still today many believe that the roots of Christian anti-Semitism are to be found in the Gospels themselves. The popular assumption is that the Gospels are overwhelmingly hostile toward the Jews, blaming them collectively for the death of Christ. For example, Ken Spiro writes: “The negative role that the Jews play in the Passion served to create a solid foundation on which later Christian anti-Semitism would be built.”<sup>5</sup>

Spiro continues saying, “Probably, the most damning of all accusations appears in John 8:44: ‘You are the children of your father, the Devil, and you want to follow your father’s desires. From the beginning he was a murderer.’”<sup>6</sup> The companion text often quoted by those who argue for the collective guilt of the Jews as “Christ-killers,” is Matthew 27:25: “And all the people answered, ‘His blood be on us and on our children!’” Texts such as these have been used historically to accuse the Jewish people of deicide, that is, of being “Christ-killers.” Because of this crime, the Jews are allegedly under a permanent divine curse, which has doomed them to suffer rejection, persecution, and suppression during the Christian era until the end of time.

The Passion Plays have served to dramatize the crime of deicide, by portraying the dominant role of the wicked Jews in the condemnation and crucifixion of Christ. The mass hysteria generated by the annual plays, enraged the people against the “Christ-killing Jews,” accusing them of well poisoning, causing the Black Plague, and ritual murder. These accusations, as noted in Chapter 1, led to the dehumanization, demonization, brutalization, expulsion, and murder of countless Jews throughout Europe. The anti-Semitic climate fostered by the Passion Plays predisposed many Christians to accept Hitler’s “final solution” to the Jewish problem as a divine solution.

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## Are the Roots of Anti-Semitism Found in the Gospels?

The historical use of the Passion narratives to blame the Jews collectively for the death of Christ, raises important questions: Are the roots of anti-Semitism to be found in the Gospels themselves or in later religious-historical developments? Are the Passion Plays true to the Gospels in portraying the Jewish people as being collectively guilty of murdering Christ? Do the Gospels place the blame for Christ’s death on all the Jews, including future generations yet to be born, or on some Jewish leaders and their followers?

These questions deserves serious consideration, because what is at stake is the legitimacy of the “Christian” theology of contempt toward the Jews, effectively dramatized in Passion Plays, like Gibson’s movie. This theology, as noted in Chapter 1, has led to the systematic suppression, expulsion, and liquidation of millions of Jews during the course of Christian history. Furthermore, this theology has contributed in recent times to the development of dispensationalism—a theological system widely accepted by Evangelical churches today.

A fundamental tenet of dispensationalism is that God terminated His dealing with the Jews at the Cross (or Pentecost) because they rejected and killed Christ, and inaugurated the Christian dispensation to last until the Rapture. This theological construct gives preferential treatment to Christians over the Jews. In fact, soon God is supposed to secretly rapture Christians away from this earth in order to pour out the seven last plagues on the Jews and the unconverted people left behind. This scenario is being popularized today by the movie *Left Behind* and the series of books by the same title, which are selling by the millions, faster than McDonald’s hamburgers.

## Were all the Jews Hostile to Christ?

Since the roots of anti-Semitism and dispensationalism are generally traced back to the role of the Jewish people in Christ’s death, it is imperative to understand what the Gospels really teach us on this subject. A superficial reading of few isolated texts cited earlier, without paying attention to their immediate and large contexts, could lead one to conclude that the Gospels place the guilt for Christ’s death collectively on the Jewish

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people, marking them as a cursed people for all times. But a closer look at all the relevant texts, reveals that to stereotype all the Jews as Christ’s killers, means to ignore that Jesus, His disciples, and the many people who believed in Him, were all Jews.

To clarify this point let us look at the use of the phrase “the Jews,” in the Gospel of John. The reason for choosing John’s Gospel is the prevailing assumption that this Gospel is more anti-Semitic than the Synoptics, because it uses the inclusive phrase “the Jews” over 60 times, in place of the terms “Scribes” and “Pharisees” used in Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

Does the frequent reference to “the Jews” in John’s Gospel, makes this Gospel particularly anti-Semitic? The answer is “NO!” because the phrase is used with three different connotations. First, the phrase “the Jews,” is used to designate the Jewish people in general without any negative value attach to it. For example, when Jesus wept by the grave of Lazarus, we are told that “The Jews said, ‘see how he loved him’” (John 11:36). In this instance “the Jews” are the people surrounding Jesus who were moved by His show of affection for Lazarus. There is no indication that this group of Jews hated Jesus.

Second, the phrase “the Jews” is used in John to denote the people who believed in Christ. For examples, Nicodemus is described as “a ruler of the Jews” who believed in Christ (John 3:1). At the resurrection of Lazarus we are told that “Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what he did, believed in him” (John 11:45). Shortly we shall see that the growing popularity of Jesus among the Jewish people was seen by some religious leaders as a threat to their authority.

Third, the phrase “the Jews” is frequently used to denote “the leaders of the Jews” who were scheming to kill Christ. Here are some examples. “The Jews took up stones again to stone him” (John 10:31). “The Jews sought all the more to kill him, because he not only broke the sabbath, but also called God his own Father, making himself equal with God” (John 5:18). Again, “The Jews cried out, ‘If you release this man, you are not Caesar’s friend’” (John 19:12).

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Taken out of their context, these statements could be interpreted as descriptive of the determination of the whole Jewish nation to kill Jesus. However, such an interpretation ignores two things. First, the immediate context indicates that “the Jews” in question were those present at the incidents described, not the Jewish people as a whole.

### **Christ’s Popularity Was a Threat to Jewish Leaders**

Second, in the larger context of John’s Gospel, “the Jews” include also, as noted earlier, the people who believed in Christ and followed Him. In fact, their numbers must have been significant, because we are told that “the chief priests planned to put Lazarus also to death, because on account of him many of the Jews were going away and believing in Jesus” (John 12:10-11). This text highlights the contrast between the chief priests and “many of the Jews.” On the one side there are the chief priests scheming to kill not only Jesus but also Lazarus, because their authority was threatened by the increasing number of Christ’s followers. But, on the other side there are “many of the Jews” going away from the priests because they believed in Jesus. Such a split in the Jewish community, hardly indicates that all the Jews were hostile toward Christ.

The Gospels suggest that Christ’s growing popularity among the common Jewish people, threatened the authority of the religious leaders. This comes out clear in the deliberation of the council held after the resurrection of Lazarus. The “chief priests and the Pharisees” said: “What are we to do? For this man performs many signs. If we let him go on thus, every one will believe in him” (John 11: 47-48).

For the religious leaders the issue was the survival of their own authority. If all the people came to believe in Jesus, their authority would be rejected. For them, it was a question of survival. Either they protected their authority over the people by eliminating Christ, or Christ would soon become so popular with the people that their authority would be ultimately rejected. In their thinking the only solution was to find ways to kill Christ before all the Jews accepted Him and rejected them.

### **The Jews Were Divided in their Attitude Toward Christ**

This scenario suggests that the Jews were divided in their attitude toward Christ. Some believed in Him and some rejected Him. The latter

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group supported the religious leaders in their efforts to kill Him. John mentions this division in the context of the reaction of the people to Christ’s speech about the Good Shepherd. “There was a *division* among the Jews because of these words. Many of them said, ‘He has a demon, and he is mad; why listen to him?’ Other said, ‘These are not the sayings of one who has a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?’” (John 10:19-21; emphasis supplied).

The division in the attitude of the Jews toward Christ, discredits the claim that all the Jews were collectively antagonistic to Christ and supported their leaders in their plans to kill Him. The fact is that Jesus enjoyed considerable support, especially among the common people. John tells us the “*many even of the authorities believed in him*, but for fear of the Pharisees they did not confess it, lest they should be put out of the synagogue” (John 12:42; emphasis supplied). It is difficult to estimate the percentage of the Jews who were for Christ and of those who were against Him. Poll-taking was unknown in those days. But there appeared to have been a significant number of Jews who followed and supported Jesus all the way to the Cross.

Luke tells us that many of Christ’s supporters followed Him all the way to Golgotha: “And there followed him *a great multitude of the people*, and of the women who bewailed and lamented him” (Luke 23:27; emphasis supplied). This “*multitude*” of Jews witnessed with great anguish Christ’s crucifixion: “And all the multitude who assembled to see the sight, when they saw what had taken place, returned home beating their breast” (Luke 23:48).

Luke’s description of a *great multitude* of Jews following Jesus all the way to the Cross, expressing their grief by bewailing and beating their breasts for the crime committed in torturing and crucifying Jesus, hardly support the contention that all the Jews were hostile to Christ and called for His death. In his informative chapter on “The Jewish Leaders,” Alan F. Segal, Professor of Religion and Jewish Studies at Columbia University, notes that a careful study of “the relevant texts in the Gospels shows that a relatively small and elite group of people, a group among the Temple priests and elders, was out to get Jesus.”<sup>7</sup>

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## Paul Rejects the Notion that the Jews Are a Cursed People

The division among the Jews in their attitude toward Christ, which we find in the Gospels, is present also in the rest of the New Testament. For example, Paul rejects the notion that the whole Jewish people are cursed by God for their role in Christ’s death. He writes: “I ask then, has God rejected his people? By no means! I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin. God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew” (Rom 11:1-2).

To support his point, the Apostle explains that like at the time of Elijah, there were “seven thousand men who had not bowed the knee to Baal, so too at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace” (Rom 11:4-5). The presence of a “remnant” of believing Jews, indicates to Paul that God has not rejected the Jews as a cursed people, replacing them with Gentile believers. To clarify this point, he uses the effective imagery of the olive tree. The broken branches of the olive tree represent the unbelieving Jews who have been replaced by the wild branches of the Gentiles. The latter “were grafted in their place to share the richness of the olive tree” (Rom 11:17).

Note that for Paul the olive tree, representing the Jewish people, is not uprooted because of their role in Christ’s death, but rather is pruned and restructured through the engrafting of Gentile branches. Gentile Christians live from the root and trunk of the Jewish people (Rom 11:17-18). By means of this expressive imagery Paul describes the unity and continuity that exists in God’s redemptive plan for the Jews and Gentiles.

The olive tree imagery leaves no room for the replacement theology of dispensationalism. The Jews are not a cursed people replaced by Christians, but are part of God’s plan for the salvation of Jews and Gentiles. Paul explains this mystery saying: “I want you to understand this mystery, brethren: a hardening has come upon part of Israel, until the full number of the Gentiles come in, and so all Israel will be saved” (Rom 11:25-26). In Paul’s vision, God does not have two plans or dispensations, one for the Gentile Christians raptured to heaven and one for the Jews condemned to suffer the seven last plagues for killing Christ. This dispensational scenario, popular among Evangelicals, is foreign to the Bible. Paul envisions the ingathering of the Gentiles who join believing Jews, so that both of them will be saved.

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Summing up, the New Testament offers us a balanced picture of the Jews. On the one hand, it places the responsibility for Christ’s death on a relatively small group of Jewish religious leaders and their followers, who pushed for the condemnation and execution of Jesus. But, on the other hand, the New Testament acknowledges that a significant number of Jews who believed in Christ, followed Him to the Cross, lamented His death, and responded by the thousands on the day of Pentecost and afterwards to the messianic proclamation (Acts 2:41; 4:4; 21:20).

### **The Origin of Anti-Semitism**

The balanced portrayal of the Jews in the Passion narratives of the Gospels, with supporters and opponents of Christ, was gradually replaced by the one-sided picture of the Jews as a wicked people, collectively guilty of killing Christ. The development of this “Christian” theology of contempt of the Jews was a gradual process. Two major factors contributed to this development: (1) the conflict between the church and the synagogue and (2) the Roman suppression of Jewish revolts, which resulted in the outlaw of the Jewish religion and the Sabbath.

The conversion of Gentiles to the Christian faith engendered considerable hostility on the part of the Jews, who felt threatened by the Christian growth. Paul compares the Jewish hostility toward Christians to that endured by Christ during His Passion. Speaking of the Jews he says that they “killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out, and displease God and oppose all men by hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles that they may be saved—so as always to fill up the measure of their sins” (1 Thess 2:15-16).

At this early period Christian Jews like Paul spoke of “the Jews who killed the Lord Jesus,” without meaning to charge all the Jews collectively of deicide. The phrase was restricted to one particular group of Jews, namely, those Jewish leaders and their supporters who pushed for the condemnation and crucifixion of Christ. We noted earlier that Paul speaks of a *partial* hardening of Israel (Rom 11:25), which he compares to the breaking off of *some* branches from the olive tree of Israel.

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But, by the beginning of the second century, the growing conflict between the church and synagogue, influenced the inclusive use of phrase “the Jews,” as descriptive of all the Jews. The fact that Jewish Christians were expelled from synagogues, led them to abandon the use of the term “Jews” to describe themselves. Thus, ethnic Jewish Christians distanced themselves from the Jews by gradually identifying themselves solely as Christians

### The Development of a “Christian” Theology of Anti-Semitism

The development of anti-Semitism was precipitated by the anti-Jewish and anti-Sabbath legislation promulgated by Emperor Hadrian in A. D. 135. I investigated the Hadrianic anti-Jewish legislation in my doctoral dissertation *From Sabbath to Sunday*. I learned that after suppressing the second major Palestinian Jewish revolt in A. D. 135—called after its leader, the Barkokoba revolt—Hadrian, not only destroyed the city of Jerusalem and prohibited the Jews to enter the city, but he also outlawed categorically the practice of the Jewish religion in general and of Sabbathkeeping in particular. These measures were designed to suppress the Jewish religion, which was seen as the cause of all the uprisings.

At this critical time when the Jewish religion in general and the Sabbath in particular were outlawed by the Roman legislation, some Christian leaders began to develop of theology of contempt toward the Jews. This consisted in defaming the Jews as a people and in emptying Jewish beliefs and practices of any historical significance.

For example, Justin Martyr (about 100-165), a leader of the Church of Rome, defames the Jews as murderers of the prophets and Christ: “Your hand is still lifted to do evil, because, although you have slain Christ, you do not repent; on the contrary, you hate and whenever you have the power kill us.”<sup>8</sup>

Institution like the circumcision and the Sabbath are declared by Justin to be signs of Jewish depravity, imposed by God solely on the Jews to distinguish them from other nations. The purpose of these signs was to mark the Jews for the punishment they so well deserve for their wickedness. “It was by reason of your sins and the sins of your fathers that, among other precepts, God imposed upon you the observance of the Sabbath as a mark”<sup>9</sup>

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## The “Christian” Vituperation of the Jews

The verbal attack against the Jews continued unabated during the first millennium of the Christian era. For example, in 386 John Chrysostom, the Patriarch of Constantinople, delivered a series of eight brutally harsh sermons against the Jews. Among other things he says: “The Jews are the most worthless of men—they are lecherous, greedy, rapacious—they are perfidious murderers of Christians, they worship the devil, their religion is a sickness . . . The Jews are the odious assassins of Christ and for killing God there is no expiation, no indulgence, no pardon. Christians may never cease vengeance. The Jews must live in servitude forever. It is incumbent on all Christians to hate the Jews.”<sup>10</sup>

On a similar vein, Gregory of Nyssa, (A. D. 330-395), Bishop of Nyssa and a most influential theologian of the fourth century, vituperates the Jews, saying: “Slayers of the Lord, murderers of the prophets, adversaries of God, haters of God, men who show contempt for the law, foes of grace, enemies of the father's faith, advocates of the devil, brood of vipers, slanderers, scoffers, men whose minds are in darkness, leaven of the Pharisees, assembly of demons, sinners, wicked men, stoners and haters of righteousness.”<sup>11</sup>

Catholic historian Gerard S. Sloyan concludes his survey of the treatment of the Jews in the Christian literature of the first six centuries, saying: “It came to be assumed very early in the patristic age that every member of subsequent generations of Jews concurred in this wicked deed [of killing Christ]. There was, of course, no evidence for this assumption, but it was thought that their failure to become Christians proved it. . . . The Jews began a centuries-long history of being stigmatized as the killers of Christ on the Cross, when in fact they would have repudiated to a person the small number of Jews in power who had a part in the deed.”<sup>12</sup>

## Anti-Semitism in the Second Millennium

The notion of the Jews as “Christ-killers,” which developed during the first millennium, gained greater prominence in the second millennium. During the first millennium the Christian hostility toward the Jews was at the simmering stage, consisting mostly of verbal attacks. The situation

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changed dramatically with the dawning of the second millennium. Physical acts of violence against the Jews became common place.

To understand this new development, we need to look at two contributing factors. First, the continued existence of the Jews became an irritant situation to many Christians. For a thousand years Christians had been taught that the Jews had failed in their mission. By refusing to accept Christ as their Messiah, and worse, by conspiring to have Him killed, they were rejected by God and replaced with the “new chosen people.”

By this line of reasoning there was no longer any purpose for the Jews in the world. They should have disappeared like so many mightier nations. Yet, after 1000 years from the death of Christ, the Jews were still all over the place, and at times strong and prosperous. To give some sort of an answer to this problem, some Christian theologians developed the notion that the Jews have been doomed by God to wander the earth to bear witness until the end of time of the divine curse that rests upon them for killing Christ. This theology inspired fanatical Christians to prove God right by murdering countless Jews throughout Europe.

### **The Devotion to Christ’s Sufferings**

A second major contributing factor to the new wave of anti-Semitism during the early part of the second millennium, is the new religious revival in the Christian world which historians call the “New Piety.” The focus of the New Piety, as noted in Chapter 1, was the devotion to Christ’s suffering and a desire to suffer with Him in His Passion as a way of salvation. The devotion to the Passion inspired the staging of Passion Plays which portrayed the role of the Jews in the trial, scourging, torture, and crucifixion of Jesus. By imitating the sufferings of Christ’s Passion, believers sought to placate God, whom they believe to be responsible for the catastrophes and tragedies that were ravaging Europe at that time.

The portrayal of the Jews in the Passion Plays as collectively guilty for Christ’s death, inflamed the people who left their annual Plays, raging against the “Christ-killing Jews,” accusing them of well poisoning, causing the Black Plague, and ritual murder. These accusation led to the dehumanization, demonization, brutalization, expulsion, and murder of countless Jews throughout Europe.

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## The Problem of the Passion Plays

The problem with the Passion Plays is the collective portrayal of the Jews as a sadistic and bloodthirsty people, determined to see Christ killed at any cost. A good example is Mel Gibson’s movie on *The Passion*, where the Jews appear throughout the movie as mean, sadistic, with angry looks and bad teeth. There are no shots in the movie of the multitudes of Christ’s supporters, following Him to Golgotha, and expressing their grief by beating their breast.

Gibson focuses exclusively on the wicked Jewish leaders who always stand in the front row of the crowd with their evil look and sinister faces. They show no compassion toward the lacerated body of Jesus made worse at every passing moment by the relentless blows. The only time they express grief is when they see their Temple collapsing as a result of the earthquake that accompanied Christ’s death. This is one of the many unbiblical and unhistorical episodes, designed to show God’s rejection of the Jews.

In a penetrating analysis of the portrayal of the Jews in *The Passion*, Prof. Alan Segal rightly observes: “No one can miss that *The Passion* uses the Jewish leaders baldly to express the evil undercurrent of the film. . . . They are the only power to arrest Jesus in the garden, whereas the Gospels also include the Romans (John 18:3). They throw the shackled Jesus off a bridge on his way to the high priest. They mistreat Jesus throughout the film. When Mary Magdalene entreats the Romans to help Jesus, they answer by saying, ‘They are trying to hide their crime from you.’ Agents of the high priest bribe a crowd to demand Jesus death. The Jews are present at the scourging as well as at the crucifixion. Furthermore, Satan is constantly depicted as present among them. Even Jewish children turn into devils to torture Judas before he hangs himself. An aide of Pilate tells him that the Pharisees hate Jesus. Pilate criticizes the Jewish abuse of Jesus by asking the question: ‘Do you always punish your prisoners before they are judged?’ Pilate tells his wife that he fears that the Jewish high priest will lead a revolt against Rome if he does not yield to Jewish demands to have Jesus killed.”<sup>13</sup>

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## Mel Gibson’s Distortions of the Passion Narratives

Segal continues by pointing out that “none of the aforementioned depictions of the Jews in Mel Gibson’s film—from the arrest of Jesus to the leaders’ mistreatment of Jesus, to the bribe to whip up the crowd, to the presence of Satan among them, to the presence of the elders at the crucifixion—none of them are present in the New Testament. In spite of Gibson’s frequent claims that his film is true to the Bible, in these crucial places it is not. Every one of these Jewish actions depicted in the film is not in the Gospels.”<sup>14</sup>

Had Gibson wanted to be true to the Gospels, he could have portrayed the clandestine arrest of Jesus at night, because the chief priests were afraid of a popular uprising by the multitude of people who supported Jesus. We read in Mark 14:2 that “the chief priests and the scribes were seeking how to arrest him by stealth . . . lest there be a tumult of the people.” He could have respected John 11:48, by portraying Caiaphas expressing the fear that the Romans might destroy the Temple, instead of depicting Pilate as fearing that Caiaphas would incite a revolt.

Gibson could have followed the account of Mark 15:15 and Matthew 27:26 where Jesus is scourged *after* Pilate’s condemnation as part of the Roman crucifixion procedure. Instead Gibson chose to have Pilate order the scourging of Jesus *before* the condemnation in order to show that nothing could change the determination of the wicked Jews to demand Christ’s death. The intent of rearranging the time of the scourging is designed to show that the Jews were so bloodthirsty that nothing could change their minds.

### Did Gibson Intend to Be True to the Gospels?

Had Gibson wanted to be true to the Gospels, he would not have portrayed Pilate saying to Caiaphas: “Do you always punish your prisoners before they are judged?” The intent of these unbiblical words is to portray the Jews as a lawless people who take the law in their own hands. What they did to Christ is part of their well-known wicked nature. Again, he would not have had Pilate say the following words not found in any Gospel: “Isn’t this scourging enough?” “It is you who want him crucified, not I.” These

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unbiblical words are designed to heighten the responsibility of the Jewish people for Christ’s death.

More important still, had Gibson wanted to be true to the Gospels’ picture of the Jews, he would have depicted “a great multitude of the people, and of women who bewailed and lamented him” (Luke 23:27) on the way to Golgotha. He would also have shown in the movie “all the multitude who assembled to see the sight [of the crucifixion], and when they saw what had taken place, returned home beating their breast” (Luke 23:48).

### **Why Did Gibson Ignore the Multitude of Jews Who Followed Christ to the Cross?**

Why did Gibson choose to ignore the scenes of the multitude of the Jews grieving over Jesus death? Why did he choose to have Christ’s body taken down from the Cross by John and Mary, instead of following the biblical account which speaks of Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus taking care of Christ’s body (John 19:38-39)? Why did Gibson choose to disregard those episodes of the Passion that depict the positive response of many Jews to Christ? The answer to these question is simple. Gibson was determined to follow the pre-Vatican II Catholic tradition that stereotypes all the Jews as a wicked people, under God’s curse for killing Christ.

To create his own cinematic version of *The Passion*, Gibson relied primarily on Anne Catherine Emmerich’s *The Dolorous Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ*. The following chapter examines Gibson’s dependency upon *The Dolorous Passion*. We shall see that her hateful depiction of the Jews as Christ-killers, is totally inappropriate to a confessing twenty-first century Christian community that has largely recognized that Christ’s death cannot be blamed on all the Jews then living, without distinction, nor upon the Jews of later generations.

Gibson’s hateful depiction of the Jews, as Segal aptly puts it, “is not just a blemish on an otherwise wonderful film: it takes a film which was capable of being a milestone of spirituality in its depiction of Jesus’ sufferings and turns it into a *moral tragedy*. The screenwriter and the producer were conscious of the [untrue] depiction and must bear respon-

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sibility for this issue. To go beyond the Gospels in the depiction of the opposition of the Jews is to say that one is supplying part of the anti-Jewish polemic from one’s own imagination. . . . The charge of anti-Semitism against this film ought to be taken very seriously.”<sup>15</sup>

### Gibson Ignores Emmerich’s Description of Jesus’ Friends

Surprisingly, though Gibson follows very closely the script of Anne Catherine Emmerich’s *The Dolorous Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ*, he chooses to ignore her descriptions of the many Jews who sorely lamented the arrest and trial of Jesus. In spite of her passionate anti-Semitism, unlike Gibson, Emmerich does echo the Gospel accounts of the Jews who supported Jesus. For example, in the chapter on the arrest of Jesus, Emmerich says: “When, all at once, the arrest of Jesus was announced, and every one was aroused, both his *friends and foes*, and numbers immediately responded to the summons of the High Priest, and left their dwellings to assemble at his court.”<sup>16</sup> The mention of “*friends*,” implies that Emmerich acknowledges that many Jews supported Jesus.

Emmerich describes the grief and sorrow of Jesus’ friends, with these moving words: “Cries and lamentations arose on all sides; the poor women and children ran backwards and forwards, weeping and wringing their hands; and calling to mind all the benefits they had received from our Lord, they cast themselves on their knees to implore the protection of Heaven. But the soldiers pushed them on one side, struck them, obliged them to return to their houses, and exclaimed, ‘What farther proof is required? Does not the conduct of these persons show plainly that the Galilean incites rebellion?’”<sup>17</sup>

According to Emmerich, the touching demonstrations of grief were most evident in a district of Jerusalem, called Ophel: “In no part of Jerusalem did the arrest of Jesus produce more touching demonstrations of grief than among the poor inhabitants of Ophel, the greatest part of whom were day-laborers, and the rest principally employed in menial offices in the service of the Temple. The news came unexpectedly upon them; for some time they doubted the truth of the report, and wavered between hope and fear; but the sight of their Master, their Benefactor, their Consoler, dragged through the streets, torn, bruised, and ill-treated in every imaginable way, filled them with horror.”<sup>18</sup>

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Emmerich continues describing what happened when the procession escorting Christ to Caiaphas reached the gate of Ophel: “Here Jesus was again saluted by the cries of grief and sympathy of those who owed him so much gratitude, and the soldiers had considerable difficulty in keeping back the men and women who crowded round from all parts. They clasped their hands, fell on their knees, lamented and exclaimed, ‘Release this man unto us, release him! Who will assist, who will console us, who will cure our diseases? Release him unto us!’”<sup>19</sup>

Even at the Cross, according to Emmerich, many spectators were deeply moved by Christ’s sufferings and were converted. “[The Pharisees] listened anxiously to the groans of the penitents, who were lamenting and striking their breasts, and then left Calvary. Many among the spectators were really converted, and the greatest part returned to Jerusalem perfectly overcome with fear. . . . The friends of Jesus stood round the Cross, contemplated our Lord, and wept; many among the holy women had returned to their homes, and all were silent and overcome with grief.”<sup>20</sup>

Had Gibson followed Emmerich’s script all the way, he would have included in the film, moving scenes of the multitudes of Jews who sorely lamented Christ’s arrest, and pleaded for His release. He would have portrayed many of the spectators at the Cross who “were really converted” and returned to Jerusalem overcome with grief.

### **Gibson Chose to Portray His Traditional Beliefs**

Why did Gibson choose to follow almost slavishly Emmerich’s script, when it comes to his portrayal of the wicked Jews who brutalized and crucified Christ, but he decided to completely ignore it, when it comes to her accounts of the many sincere Jews who bewailed and lamented Jesus’ sufferings and death? His disregard for Emmerich’s script about the many Jews who lamented Christ’s suffering, is aggravated by the fact that the Gospels largely support her descriptions. In other words, Gibson ignored the two major sources of his movie, choosing instead to follow the traditional pre-Vatican II teachings of the collective guilt of the Jews for Christ’s death.

Gibson’s decision to ignore the balanced picture of the Jews found in the Gospels and in *The Dolorous Passion*, poses two major problems.

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First, it contradicts his bold claims about the faithfulness of his movie to Scripture and history. In chapter 3 we have shown that many of the actions of the Jewish authorities portrayed in the film, are not found in the Gospels. The brutal treatment of Jesus after His arrest by Jewish guards, the bribes paid to whip up the crowd, the constant visible presence of devils and Satan to sway the people, the prominent role of Mary from Gethsemane to Golgotha, the relentless brutal torture of Jesus to satisfy a punitive God, the story of Veronica, and the presence of Jewish leaders at the crucifixion, none of these scenes are found in the Gospels.

The second major problem is Gibson’s consistent portrayal of the Jews as a demonic, wicked people responsible for Christ’s crucifixion. This pre-holocaust view of the Jews is a sad commentary on the history of the Christian church. It has fostered a theology of contempt for the Jews which has influenced, not only the change from Sabbath to Sunday, but also the development of dispensationalism—a system of salvation where God favors the church at the expenses of the Jews.

Emmerich’s anti-Semitism can be partly excused, because her visions largely reflect the Catholic beliefs of her time. But today, we live in a post-holocaust world, when Catholic and Protestant churches have boldly rejected anti-Semitism as an evil and sinful legacy of the past. For Gibson to uncritically portray the Jews as collectively guilty of deicide, means to perpetuate the grievous sins of the past.

In the concluding chapter of the symposium on *Mel Gibson and THE PASSION OF THE CHRIST*, produced by an international team of scholars, Kathleen Corley and Robert Webb, comment on the “specter of anti-Semitism” in Gibson’s movie, saying: “It is sad that in a post-holocaust world more care was not taken to address the issue of anti-Semitism, for if cultural leaders (and whether we like it or not, Hollywood does provide cultural leadership) set this kind of example, then the cultural effects could be negative and long-lasting.”<sup>21</sup>

Gibson is a traditionalist Catholic who has produced a Catholic film with a distinct Catholic message. The movie is offering an unprecedented opportunity for the Catholic Church to evangelize Evangelicals. The Catholic Church acknowledges this fact. For example, *The Catholic*

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*Passion Outreach* affirms: “*The Passion of The Christ* offers an unprecedented cultural opportunity for you to spread, strengthen, and share the Catholic faith with your family and friends. Unlike any other, this movie will inspire hearts and change minds.”<sup>22</sup>

The viewing public must be made aware that *The Passion of the Christ* tells the story of Jesus’ sufferings and death, according to Catholic traditional beliefs. Numerous scenes, like the story of Veronica, the role of Mary in gathering Jesus’ blood after the flogging and taking His body down from the Cross, the seven falls of Jesus on the way to Golgotha, derive from Catholic legends and superstitions. Most moviegoers do not generally make distinctions between biblical truths and unbiblical errors when they see a film like *The Passion*. It is my hope that this study will help many people with inquiring minds to recognize and appreciate the distinction between *The Passion of Christ according to Mel Gibson* and *The Passion of Christ according to the Gospels*.

## CONCLUSION

Our study of the origin and development of the “Christian” theology of contempt for the Jews, can be summed up in four major points. First, contrary to prevailing assumptions the roots of anti-Semitism cannot be legitimately found in the New Testament. The Gospels’ writers and Paul place the responsibility for Christ’s death on a relatively small group of Jewish religious leaders and their followers, who pushed for the condemnation and execution of Jesus. They acknowledge that a significant number of Jews believed in Christ, followed Him to the Cross, lamented His death, and responded by the thousands on the day of Pentecost and afterwards to the messianic proclamation (Acts 2:41; 4:4; 21:20).

Second, the origin of “Christian” anti-Semitism can be traced to the post-apostolic period as a result of two major factors: the first, is the conflict between the church and the synagogue and the second, is the Roman suppression of Jewish revolts, which resulted in the outlaw of the Jewish religion in general and of the Sabbath in particular.

When the Roman government attempted to suppress the Jewish religion, Christian leaders launched a twofold attack against the Jews: on the one hand, they defamed the Jews as a people and on the other hand, they

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emptied Jewish beliefs and practices of any historical significance. The vituperation of the Jews continued unabated during the first millennium of the Christian era, though it consisted mostly of verbal attacks.

Third, with the dawning of the second millennium, a new wave of anti-Semitism erupted, spurred by a new religious piety, characterized by the devotion to Christ’s suffering as a way of salvation. The devotion to Christ’s Passion inspired the staging of Passion Plays which portrayed the Jews as collectively guilty for Christ’s death. The Plays inflamed the people against the “Christ-killing Jews.” The result was the brutalization, expulsion, and murder of countless Jews throughout Europe.

Fourth, Gibson’s movie on *The Passion*, follows the traditional script of the Passion Plays, where the Jews are portrayed as a sadistic and bloodthirsty people, collectively guilty of Christ’s death. We have found that Gibson intentionally chose to disregard the positive response of many Jews to Christ. The reason is his commitment to the pre-Vatican II Catholic tradition that stereotyped all the Jews as a wicked people, under God’s curse for killing Christ.

Gibson’s one sided and hateful depiction of the Jews, as Prof. Segal perceptively observes, “takes a film which was capable of being a milestone of spirituality in its depiction of Jesus’ sufferings and turns it into a *moral tragedy*.”<sup>32</sup> Gibson’s hateful depiction of the Jews as Christ-killers, is totally inappropriate for a confessing twenty-first century Christian community that has long recognized that Christ was killed by sinners in general, and not by the Jewish people in particular.

## ENDNOTES

1. Alan F. Segal, “The Jewish Leaders,” in *Jesus and Mel Gibson’s The Passion of the Christ. The Film, the Gospels and the Claims of History*, Eds. Kathleen F. Corley and Robert L. Webb, (New York, 2004), p. 93.

2. For a discussion of the malediction of the Christians, see Samuele Bacchiocchi, *From Sabbath to Sunday. A Historical Investigation of the Rise of Sunday Observance in Early Christianity* (Rome, 1977), pp. 157-159.

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3. Angel Manuel Rodríguez, “Art or Idol?” <http://biblicalresearch.gc.adventist.org/Biblequestions/Art%20or%20Idol.htm>  
Emphasis supplied.
  4. “What Others Are Saying,” [www.passionchrist.org](http://www.passionchrist.org).
  5. Ken Spiro, “The Passion: A Historical Perspective,” [http://www.wish.com/literacy/jewishhistory/The\\_Passion\\_A\\_Historical\\_Perspective.asp](http://www.wish.com/literacy/jewishhistory/The_Passion_A_Historical_Perspective.asp).
  6. Ibid.
  7. Alan F. Segal, “The Jewish Leaders,” in the symposium *Jesus and Mel Gibson’s The Passion of the Christ. The film, the Gospels and the Claims of History*, Edited by Kathleen E. Corley and Robert L. Webb, (New York, 2004), p. 98.
  8. Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* chapter 133; For a discussion of the texts, see Samuele Bacchiocchi, *From Sabbath to Sunday* (Rome, 1977), pp. 227-229.
  9. Justin, *Dialogue* 21,1, Falls, *Justin’s Writings*, pp. 172-178.
  10. Allan Gould, Editor, *What Did they Think of the Jews?* (New York, 1997), p. 24.
  11. Ibid., p.25
  - 12.. Gerard S. Sloyan, *The Crucifixion of Jesus. History, Myth, Faith* (Minneapolis 1995), pp. 96-7.
  13. Allan F. Segan, note 1, p. 91,
  14. Ibid., p. 92.
  15. Ibid., p. 92. Emphasis supplied.
  16. *The Dolorous Passion*, ch. 4, p. 141; emphasis supplied.

17. Ibid., ch. 3, p. 135.

18. Ibid., ch. 5, p. 142.

19. Ibid., ch. 3, p. 135.

20. Ibid., ch. 45, p. 269.

21. Kathleen E. Corley and Robert L. Webb, “Conclusion: *The Passion*, the Gospels and the Claims of History,” in the symposium *Jesus and Mel Gibson’s The Passion of the Christ. The Film, the Gospels and the Claims of History*, eds. Kathleen E. Corley and Robert L. Webb, (New York, 2004), p. 175.

22. Catholic Passion Outreach at <http://passion.catholicexchange.com/>

22. Allan F. Segan, note 1, p. 92; Emphasis supplied