

# Golden Compass: Agenda Unmasked

*Fall/Winter 2007*

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A film called "The Golden Compass" opens December 7. It is based on the first book of a trilogy titled *His Dark Materials*. The author of this children's fantasy is Philip Pullman, a noted English atheist. It is his objective to bash Christianity and promote atheism. To kids. "The Golden Compass" is a film version of the book by that name, and it is being toned down so that Catholics, as well as Protestants, are not enraged.

The second book of the trilogy, *The Subtle Knife*, is more overt in its hatred of Christianity than the first book, and the third entry, *The Amber Spyglass*, is even more blatant. Because "The Golden Compass" is based on the least offensive of the three books, and because it is being further watered down for the big screen, some might wonder why parents should be wary of the film.

The Catholic League wants Christians to stay away from this movie precisely because it knows that the film is bait for the books: unsuspecting parents who take their children to see the movie may be impelled to buy the three books as a Christmas present. And no parent who wants to bring their children up in the faith will want any part of these books.

"The Golden Compass: Agenda Unmasked" is the Catholic League's response. It provides information about the film, "The Golden

Compass,” and details what book reviewers have said about Pullman’s books; a synopsis of his trilogy is also included.

Electronic copies of the booklet can be viewed [here](#). (Sorry, hard copies are sold out.)

It is important that all Christians, especially those with children or grandchildren, read this booklet. Anyone who does will be armed with all the ammo they need to convince friends and family members that there is nothing innocent about Pullman’s agenda. Though the movie promises to be fairly non-controversial, it may very well act as an inducement to buy Pullman’s trilogy, *His Dark Materials*. And remember, his twin goals are to promote atheism and denigrate Christianity. To kids.

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# **Child Molestation by Homosexuals and Heterosexuals**

Special Report by *Brian W. Clowes and David L. Sonnier*

*May 2005*

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# **Sexual Abuse in Social**

# Context: Clergy and Other Professionals

Special Report by Special Report by Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights

February 2004

## **PREFACE**

*The purpose of this special report is to put the recent scandal in the Catholic Church in perspective. It does not seek to exculpate anyone who had anything to do with priestly sexual misconduct, but it does seek to challenge those who continue to treat this issue in isolation. Indeed, to discuss the incidence of sexual abuse committed by Roman Catholic priests without reference to the level of offense found among the clergy of other religions, or to that of other professionals, is grossly unfair.*

*Specifically, this report was prepared to guide the discussion that will inevitably follow two major studies that will be issued on February 27. One of them, a national study on the extent of sexual abuse of minors by priests since 1950, will be released by John Jay College of Criminal Justice in New York City. The other is a study of the causes and consequences of the abuse crisis; it will be released by the National Review Board that was established by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. Both studies were done at the request of the U.S. bishops.*

*It is the belief of the Catholic League that no meaningful conversation can take place on this issue without having some baseline data regarding the incidence of abuse that occurs outside the Catholic Church. That was the sole intent of this special report, and if it contributes to that end, then it will have been a success.*

## **OVERALL DATA**

The National Child Abuse and Neglect Data Systems was developed by the Children's Bureau of the U.S. Department of Human Services in partnership with the States to collect annual statistics on child maltreatment from State child protective services agencies. For the year 2001, it was found that approximately 903,000 children were victims of child maltreatment, 10 percent of whom (or 90,000) were sexually abused. It also found that 59 percent of the perpetrators of child abuse or neglect were women and 41 percent were men.[i]

In 2001, clinical child psychologist Wade F. Horn reported on the work of researchers at Johns Hopkins University School of Public Health. The researchers found that nearly 20 percent of low-income women, recruited through family planning, obstetrical or gynecological clinics, had experienced child sexual abuse.

Horn summarized the researchers' findings on poor women as follows: "Family friends and acquaintances compose the largest group of perpetrators (28 percent), followed by such relatives as uncles and cousins (18 percent), stepfathers (12 percent), male siblings (10 percent), biological fathers (10 percent), boyfriends of the child's mother (9 percent), grandfathers and stepgrandfathers (7 percent), and strangers (4 percent)." Horn was struck by the fact that 10 percent were biological fathers and only 4 percent were strangers. "Which means," he said, "86 percent of the perpetrators were known to the family, but were someone other than the child's father." [ii]

According to Dr. Garth A. Rattray, about the same incidence of abuse occurs among all the socio-economic classes. For example, he reports that "about 85 percent of the offenders [of child sexual abuse] are family members, babysitters,

neighbors, family friends or relatives. About one in six child molesters are other children." Unlike the first study cited, Rattray reports that most of the offenders are male.[iii]

It is obvious that children are much more likely to be sexually abused by family members and friends than by anyone else. This suggests that if preventative measures are to work, they must begin in the home, and not someplace else.

## **PRIESTS**

According to a survey by the *Washington Post*, over the last four decades, less than 1.5 percent of the estimated 60,000 or more men who have served in the Catholic clergy have been accused of child sexual abuse.[iv] According to a survey by the *New York Times*, 1.8 percent of all priests ordained from 1950 to 2001 have been accused of child sexual abuse.[v] Thomas Kane, author of *Priests are People Too*, estimates that between 1 and 1.5 percent of priests have had charges made against them.[vi] Of contemporary priests, the Associated Press found that approximately two-thirds of 1 percent of priests have charges pending against them.[vii]

Almost all the priests who abuse children are homosexuals. Dr. Thomas Plante, a psychologist at Santa Clara University, found that "80 to 90% of all priests who in fact abuse minors have sexually engaged with adolescent boys, not prepubescent children. Thus, the teenager is more at risk than the young altar boy or girls of any age." [viii]

The situation in Boston, the epicenter of the scandal, is even worse. According to the *Boston Globe*, "Of the clergy sex abuse cases referred to prosecutors in Eastern Massachusetts, more than 90 percent involve male victims. And the most prominent Boston lawyers for alleged victims of clergy sexual abuse have said that about 95 percent of their clients are male." [ix]

In a database analysis of reports on more than 1,200 alleged victims of priests identified by *USA Today*, 85 percent were

males.[x] In another study by *USA Today*, it was determined that of the 234 priests who have been accused of sexual abuse of a minor while serving in the nation's 10 largest dioceses and archdioceses, 91 percent of their victims were males.[xi]

Much has been made of a survey done by the *Dallas Morning News* which claims that two-thirds of the nation's bishops have allowed priests accused of sexual abuse to continue working. But the problem with the survey is its definition of abuse—it includes everything from “ignoring warnings about suspicious behavior” to “criminal convictions.”[xii] Thus, the survey is of limited utility.

## **MINISTERS**

The data on the Protestant clergy tend to focus on sexual abuse in general, not on sexual abuse of children. Thus, strict comparisons cannot always be made. But there are some comparative data available on the subject of child sexual molestation, and what has been reported is quite revealing.

In a 1984 survey, 38.6 percent of ministers reported sexual contact with a church member, and 76 percent knew of another minister who had had sexual intercourse with a parishioner.[xiii] In the same year, a Fuller Seminary survey of 1,200 ministers found that 20 percent of theologically “conservative” pastors admitted to some sexual contact outside of marriage with a church member. The figure jumped to over 40 percent for “moderates”; 50 percent of “liberal” pastors confessed to similar behavior.[xiv]

In 1990, in a study by the Park Ridge Center for the Study of Health, Faith and Ethics in Chicago, it was learned that 10 percent of ministers said they had had an affair with a parishioner and about 25 percent admitted some sexual contact with a parishioner.[xv] Two years later, a survey by *Leadership* magazine found that 37 percent of ministers confessed to having been involved in “inappropriate sexual

behavior" with a parishioner.[xvi]

In a 1993 survey by the *Journal of Pastoral Care*, 14 percent of Southern Baptist ministers said they had engaged in "inappropriate sexual behavior," and 70 percent said they knew a minister who had had such contact with a parishioner.[xvii] Joe E. Trull is co-author of the 1993 book, *Ministerial Ethics*, and he found that "from 30 to 35 percent of ministers of all denominations admit to having sexual relationships—from inappropriate touching to sexual intercourse—outside of marriage." [xviii]

According to a 2000 report to the Baptist General Convention in Texas, "The incidence of sexual abuse by clergy has reached 'horrific proportions.'" It noted that in studies done in the 1980s, 12 percent of ministers had "engaged in sexual intercourse with members" and nearly 40 percent had "acknowledged sexually inappropriate behavior." The report concluded that "The disturbing aspect of all research is that the rate of incidence for clergy exceeds the client-professional rate for physicians and psychologists." [xix] Regarding pornography and sexual addiction, a national survey disclosed that about 20 percent of all ministers are involved in the behavior.[xx]

In the spring of 2002, when the sexual abuse scandal in the Catholic Church was receiving unprecedented attention, the *Christian Science Monitor* reported on the results of national surveys by Christian Ministry Resources. The conclusion: "Despite headlines focusing on the priest pedophile problem in the Roman Catholic Church, most American churches being hit with child sexual-abuse allegations are Protestant, and most of the alleged abusers are not clergy or staff, but church volunteers." [xxi]

Finally, in the authoritative work by Penn State professor Philip Jenkins, *Pedophiles and Priests*, it was determined that between .2 and 1.7 percent of priests are pedophiles. The

figure among the Protestant clergy ranges between 2 and 3 percent.[xxii]

### **OTHER CLERGY AND PROFESSIONALS**

Rabbi Arthur Gross Schaefer is a professor of law and ethics at Loyola Marymount University. It is his belief that sexual abuse among rabbis approximates that found among the Protestant clergy. According to one study, 73 percent of women rabbis report instances of sexual harassment. "Sadly," Rabbi Schaefer concludes, "our community's reactions up to this point have been often based on keeping things quiet in an attempt to do 'damage control.' Fear of lawsuits and bad publicity have dictated an atmosphere of hushed voices and outrage against those who dare to break ranks by speaking out." [xxiii]

Rabbi Joel Meyers, executive vice president of the Conservative Rabbinical Assembly, reports that 30 percent of rabbis who changed positions in 2000 did so involuntarily, and that sexual abuse was a factor in many instances.[xxiv] The Awareness Center devotes an entire website to "Clergy Abuse: Rabbis, Cantors & Other Trusted Officials." It is a detailed and frank look at the problem of sexual abuse by rabbis.[xxv]

The problem of sexual abuse in the Jehovah's Witnesses is evident among church elders but most of the abuse comes from congregation members. "The victims who have stepped forward are mostly girls and young women," writes Laurie Goodstein in the *New York Times*, "and many accusations involve incest." There is a victims support group available, "silentlambs," that has collected more than 5,000 Witnesses contending that the church mishandled child sexual abuse.[xxvi]

According to one study, .2 percent of athletic coaches nationwide have a criminal record of some sort of sexual offense. This translates to about 6,000 coaches in the U.S. who have been tried and found guilty of sexual offense against

children.[xxvii] It is not known how many more offenders have escaped the reach of law enforcement.

Between 3 and 12 percent of psychologists have had sexual contact with their clients. While today virtually every state considers sexual contact with a client as worthy of revoking a psychologist's license, as recently as 1987 only 31 percent of state licensing boards considered sexual relations between a psychologist and his or her patient grounds for license revocation.[xxviii] What makes this statistic so interesting is that many bishops in the 1980s took the advice of psychologists in handling molesting priests.

## **TEACHERS**

The American Medical Association found in 1986 that one in four girls, and one in eight boys, are sexually abused in or out of school before the age of 18. Two years later, a study included in *The Handbook on Sexual Abuse of Children*, reported that one in four girls, and one in six boys, is sexually abused by age 18.[xxix] It was reported in 1991 that 17.7 percent of males who graduated from high school, and 82.2 percent of females, reported sexual harassment by faculty or staff during their years in school. Fully 13.5 percent said they had sexual intercourse with their teacher.[xxx]

In New York City alone, at least one child is sexually abused by a school employee every day. One study concluded that more than 60 percent of employees accused of sexual abuse in the New York City schools were transferred to desk jobs at district offices located inside the schools. Most of these teachers are tenured and 40 percent of those transferred are repeat offenders. They call it "passing the garbage" in the schools. One reason why this exists is due to efforts by the United Federation of Teachers to protect teachers at the expense of children.[xxxi] Another is the fact that teachers accused of sexual misconduct cannot be fired under New York State law.[xxxii]

One of the nation's foremost authorities on the subject of the sexual abuse of minors in public schools is Hofstra University professor Charol Shakeshaft. In 1994, Shakeshaft and Audrey Cohan did a study of 225 cases of educator sexual abuse in New York City. Their findings are astounding.

All of the accused admitted sexual abuse of a student, but none of the abusers was reported to the authorities, and only 1 percent lost their license to teach. Only 35 percent suffered negative consequences of any kind, and 39 percent chose to leave their school district, most with positive recommendations. Some were even given an early retirement package.[xxxiii]

Moving molesting teachers from school district to school district is a common phenomenon. And in only 1 percent of the cases do superintendents notify the new school district.[xxxiv] According to Diana Jean Schemo, the term "passing the trash" is the preferred jargon among educators.[xxxv]

Shakeshaft has also determined that 15 percent of all students have experienced some kind of sexual misconduct by a teacher between kindergarten and 12<sup>th</sup> grade; the behaviors range from touching to forced penetration.[xxxvi] She and Cohan also found that up to 5 percent of teachers sexually abuse children.[xxxvii] Shakeshaft will soon be ready to release the findings of a vast study undertaken for the Planning and Evaluation Service Office of the Undersecretary, U.S. Department of Education, titled, "Educator Sexual Misconduct with Students: A Synthesis of Existing Literature on Prevalence in Connection with the Design of a National Analysis." [xxxviii]

## **CONCLUSION**

The issue of child sexual molestation is deserving of serious scholarship. Too often, assumptions have been made that this

problem is worse in the Catholic clergy than in other sectors of society. This report does not support this conclusion. Indeed, it shows that family members are the most likely to sexually molest a child. It also shows that the incidence of the sexual abuse of a minor is slightly higher among the Protestant clergy than among the Catholic clergy, and that it is significantly higher among public school teachers than among ministers and priests.

In a survey for the *Wall Street Journal-NBC News*, it was found that 64 percent of the public thought that Catholic priests frequently abused children.[xxxix] This is outrageously unfair, but it is not surprising given the media fixation on this issue. While it would be unfair to blame the media for the scandal in the Catholic Church, the constant drumbeat of negative reporting surely accounts for these remarkably skewed results.[xl]

Without comparative data, little can be learned. Numbers are not without meaning, but they don't count for much unless a baseline has been established. Moreover, sexual misconduct is difficult to measure given its mostly private nature. While crime statistics are helpful, we know from social science research that most crimes go unreported. This is especially true of sexual abuse crimes. At the end of the day, estimates culled from survey research are the best we can do.

By putting the sexual abuse scandal in the Catholic Church in perspective, it is hoped that this report will make for a more fair and educated public response.

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[xxxvii] Berta Delgado and Sarah Talalay, "Sex Cases Increase in Schools; Many Acts of Teacher Misconduct Not Being

Reported," *Sun-Sentinel*, June 4, 1995, p. 1A.

[xxxviii] The study is in draft form and is not yet available for quotation.

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[xl] The Catholic League took pains to credit the media with fair coverage of the scandal. See the "Executive Summary" of the Catholic League's *2002 Report on Anti-Catholicism*. It is available online at [www.catholicleague.org](http://www.catholicleague.org).

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## **An Open Letter to the Jewish Community**

I have seen the Mel Gibson movie, "The Passion of the Christ," on two occasions and consider it to be the most moving dramatization of the death of Jesus Christ ever made. It is magnificent beyond words. I stand with those Catholics, Protestants and Jews who have seen the film and do not find it to be anti-Semitic. If I thought it were, I would not hesitate to condemn it. Not everyone has, or will, agree with this assessment. That's fine. What is not fine is the sheer demagoguery that has accompanied some of the criticism.

Last summer, Boston University theology professor Paula Fredriksen said in *The New Republic*, "When violence breaks out, Mel Gibson will have a much higher authority than professors and bishops to answer to." Fredriksen is a self-described "raised-Catholic, Marxist-feminist convert to

Orthodox Judaism.” She did not say “if violence breaks out”—but “when.”

More disturbing than Fredriksen has been Abraham Foxman, national director of the ADL. Foxman recently gained admission to the film when it was previewed in Orlando; he did so by identifying himself as executive director of The Church of the Truth. In a news release, he wrote, “Will the film trigger pogroms against Jews? Our answer is probably not.” Which means it may.

And who exactly is it that Foxman has in mind? On January 23, he was quoted in the *Los Angeles Times* saying, “[Gibson is] hawking it on a commercial crusade to the churches of this country. That’s what makes it dangerous.” I wrote to him on January 26 asking for an apology, but none has been forthcoming. “To say the film is dangerous because the people who are previewing it are church-going Christians,” I wrote, “is an insult to practicing Christians.” I added, “The subtext of this remark is that church-going Christians are latent anti-Semitic bigots ready to lash out at Jews at any given moment.”

This is not an unusual reaction for the ADL. In 1993, when the Passion Play “Jesus Was His Name” was performed in 23 American cities, Rabbi Leon Klenicki, director of the ADL’s interfaith department, warned that the “presentation does not contribute to peace.” The record will show that not one act of violence occurred in any city.

If history is any guide, there will be no pogroms of any sort following the release of the movie. Leonard Dinnerstein, author of *Antisemitism in America*, has said, “There never have been pogroms in America; there never have been respectable antisemitic political parties in America; and there never have been any federal laws curtailing Jewish opportunities in America.” Indeed, Dinnerstein says that “in no Christian country has antisemitism been weaker than it has been in the

United States.”

This is not to suggest that Jews haven't been the subject of violence in the U.S. Historically, groups like the Ku Klux Klan targeted Jews. It also targeted Catholics and, of course, African Americans. But the claim that Jews need to be especially on guard against roving bands of thugs cannot be sustained.

In the late 1960s, a report was submitted to the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence. The commission, headed by Dr. Milton S. Eisenhower, released its findings in a book titled, *The History of Violence in America*; it was edited by Hugh Davis Graham and Ted Robert Gurr. The principal victims of violence identified in the book are Native Americans, African Americans, Roman Catholics and labor.

The worst urban riots occurred in the 1830s, 1840s and 1850s. “Among the most important types of riots,” the report says, “were labor riots, election riots, antiabolitionist riots, anti-Negro riots, anti-Catholic riots, and riots of various sorts involving the turbulent volunteer firemen's units.” Except for the Civil War draft riots, things settled down after this period. But the point to be made is that the Jewish community, albeit small, was not then, or later, among the most likely to be victimized.

Violence against Jews in more recent times has either been waged, or encouraged, by such groups as the Aryan Nation, Christian Identity, National Alliance, National Socialists, Posse Comitatus and Church of the Creator. None of these organizations is remotely Christian and many are indeed hostile to Christians (e.g. Christian Identity and Church of the Creator). The Nation of Islam is another group that is hostile to Jews; it is also hostile to Catholics. Arguably the worst anti-Semitic violence ever to occur—it was certainly in the worst in New York City's history—was the Crown Heights

riots of 1991. That this riot had absolutely nothing to do with a Christian animus toward Jews is disputed by no one.

The idea that Christians will attack Jews in the streets after seeing "The Passion of the Christ" is pernicious. Ken Jacobson, associate national director of the ADL, has said, "We have good reason to be seriously concerned about Gibson's plans to retell the Passion. Historically, the Passion—the story of the killing of Jesus—has resulted in the death of Jews." Not in this country it hasn't, and if the ADL wants to qualify its charge by citing examples from the Middle Ages, then it should do so.

Some critics of the film cite concerns stemming from the Holocaust and beyond. Harold Brackman, consultant to the Simon Wiesenthal Center, has said, "It is Christians who bear the responsibility, after 2000 years of religious-inspired anti-Semitism, to inhibit rather than inflame the excesses of their own haters. When filmmakers with a Christological agenda fail to accept this responsibility, the blood that may result is indeed on their hands." Not only is this kind of inflammatory rhetoric destructive of good Christian-Jewish relations, it makes one wonder—if Christian hatred of Jews is so visceral—why have there been no pogroms in the U.S. in over 200 years?

More sensible were those American Jews who signed the 2000 statement, "Dabru Emet." Although they properly noted that Christianity has at times fueled anti-Semitism, they nonetheless concluded, "Nazism was not a Christian phenomenon." Former New York City Mayor Ed Koch said it best: "It should never be said that Christians were responsible for the Holocaust—Nazis were. Blaming Christians would be as unjustified as holding Jews accountable for the death of Jesus. Individuals were responsible in both situations."

Moreover, Christians are no strangers to violence, either. Yehuda Bauer, former director of the Holocaust Research

Institute at Yad Vashem in Jerusalem, and retired professor of Holocaust Studies at the Hebrew University, estimates that 25 million non-Jews died in the Holocaust. I hasten to add that these victims, most of whom were Christians, were not selected for death because of their ethnic or religious status. This makes what happened to Jews of unique and surpassing importance. But it is wrong to discount the suffering of Christians. Furthermore, it is estimated that 70 million Christians have been murdered in the past 2000 years, 45 million of which occurred in the last century alone!

If "The Passion of the Christ" is so troubling, then why hasn't there been an uproar over the recent film, "The Gospel of John"? After all, it uses virtually every word of the Gospel, including words deemed offensive by critics of the Gibson film. Why was there no big hullabaloo over "Jesus Christ Superstar"?; it depicted what one reviewer called a "demonic Caiaphas." Is it because Mel Gibson is a so-called traditional Catholic? And if so, what exactly does this have to do with proclamations of violence? For Foxman, it is not hard to connect the dots: "I think he's [Gibson] infected—seriously infected—with some very, very serious anti-Semitic views. [Gibson's] got classical anti-Semitic views."

If the movie is likely to engender violence, then we should expect that when people finish watching it, they will be in a rage. But no one who has seen the film has experienced anything like anger. Even Foxman has acknowledged as much: "As the lights came up, the silence was etched with stifled sobs and tears. The 3,000 Christian pastors, leaders, students and others who attended the preview of the film's graphic portrayal of the events leading up to the Crucifixion were visibly moved by the images that brought them closer than they may ever have been to bearing witness to the Passion of Jesus." Not exactly the kind of sentiment we would expect from Christians ready to act on their latent anti-Semitism.

Some, like Rabbi Marvin Hier of the Simon Wiesenthal Center,

have said the movie has already provoked anti-Semitism; he cites bigoted phone calls and letters. But it must also be said that hate speech has been directed at the Catholic League as well. Indeed, at a rally against the movie, I had a Brooklyn rabbi tell me to my face that "your gospels are pornographic." Now I would no more blame Jews for this anti-Catholic outburst than Jews victimized by Catholic bigots should blame Catholics.

No doubt there will be anti-Semitic bigots in the Christian community who will like "The Passion of the Christ." But they will like it for all the wrong reasons, none of which finds support in contemporary Christian thought. The idea that all Jews at the time of Christ's death clamored for his crucifixion is historically wrong and patently bigoted: those who ascribe to notions of collective guilt are demented. The idea that any Jew today is somehow responsible for the behavior of some Jews 2000 years ago is even more insane.

Foxman, along with ADL consultant Rabbi Gary Bretton-Granatoor, said after viewing the film, "What we saw makes a mockery of the teachings of the Second Vatican Council." I will stand with Catholic theologian Michael Novak: "Gibson's film is wholly consistent with the Second Vatican Council's presentation of the relations of Judaism and the Christian Church." Let it be said that reasonable people can disagree about this, but what cannot be tolerated is casting aspersions on "church-going Christians."

I am no stranger to the fight against anti-Semitism. I have joined with the ADL in publicly denouncing Louis Farrakhan; I have gone to Harlem at the request of the Jewish Action Alliance to condemn the hatred of the late Nation of Islam official, Khalid Muhammad; I have joined Norman Siegel, previously of the New York Civil Liberties Union, in denouncing the anti-Semitism that occurred during the controversy over the Brooklyn Museum of Art (he denounced the anti-Catholicism that took place); when a Jewish-led boycott

of the Jewish Museum was organized to protest art trivializing the Holocaust, I asked Catholics to support it; in December I joined with Norm Siegel and others to publicly condemn a rash of violence against synagogues in Brooklyn and Queens. And on January 20, at the behest of Americans for a Safe Israel, I wrote a letter to Israeli Knesset members pledging support for “a safe and secure Israel.”

Before closing, please understand that many Christians deeply resent the kinds of movies Hollywood has been releasing over the last few decades. They especially resent the long list of anti-Christian films that have been made (most of which have been explicitly anti-Catholic). And now that they finally have a film they can be proud of, some are calling them bigots, if not thugs.

Christian-Jewish relations have improved markedly over the past few decades, and in this regard no one has been more influential than Pope John Paul II. It would not only be unfortunate—it would be a travesty—if the reaction to a film about the death of Jesus were to undo the good that has been done. I pray it will not.

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# **Report on Newsday (NY) and the Church**

*January 2004*

Part 1: General Catholic Church Coverage

January 2002-December 2003

**Columnists**

- *Dick Ryan: "The laity must begin to convince those Catholics who seem asleep that their church is in a terminal crisis that involves everybody. It can no longer be enough to 'hit the rail' on Sunday and piously say the rosary, while the abuse of authority and position continues to be a blemish on the face of the church." ("Bishop's Response to Questions Is More PR," 11/18/03)*
- *Paul Vitello: "The Diocese of Rockville Centre, like many dioceses all over the United States, would walk through hell itself rather than tell. ... If you were a person with a sexual appetite for child abuse and sadism, the priesthood was a good bet for you. ... Most priests are not sexual predators. And there are sexual predators in other lines of work besides the priesthood. But for many years, the hierarchy of the diocese of Rockville Centre knew the names of just about every sexual predator who wore the collar in its parishes—and never once turned one over to the law." ("Battle of the Legal Gladiators," 11/4/03)*
- *Bob Keeler: "My attitude is to rejoice in John Paul's breakthroughs on Jewish-Catholic relations (accomplishment enough for any pope), to forgive him his flaws, and to pray that future popes will heal the hurts that his sometimes tyrannical papacy has caused women, theologians, sexual-abuse victims, gay folks and others." ("The Legacy of a Great Pope Is a Mixed Blessing," 10/20/03)*
- *Jimmy Breslin: On Pope John Paul II: "As he sits in a wheelchair, tilted over, these minions scurry about and announce that his mind is more brilliant than ever, his judgments swift and sound—when the last years of this pope have come down to five issues: Poland, Poland, Poland, abortion and contraception." ("Mystery That Can't Be Divined," 10/19/03)*
- *Ellis Henican: On Mother Teresa's beatification: "I hate to ruin a good party, especially with all the bad news*

the church has had. But I just hope we don't have another Christopher on our hands." ("Too Swift to Sainthood," 10/15/03)

- Dennis Duggan: "The St. Patrick's Day Parade...is run by old, beefy men who have rules for everyone, and God help you if you don't abide by them. They are the Magdalene sisters of parades." ("Old Parades, Give Way," 10/14/03)
- Bob Keeler: "Among other things, critics believe John Paul's centralization of the church has smothered the collegial relationship between the bishop of Rome and his brother bishops." ("A Quarter Century of John Paul II: A Giant Among Popes," 10/12/03)
- Paul Vitello: "The issue...is a self-protecting silence at the core that permits children to be hurt. In the Catholic Church, it has meant sending predatory priests from one parish to another without warning because, on the advice of counsel, disclosure might lead to lawsuits." ("Playing the Legal Book," 9/28/03)\_\_\_
- Dennis Duggan: "The Catholic Church has gone the way of the big corporate honchos who cheated their stockholders, holding them in the same disdain that the church hierarchy holds its faithful." ("Few Tears Are Shed," 8/26/03)
- Marie Cocco: "New York is, after all, a state where kowtowing to the cardinal is a practiced political art. Where finding deep meaning in the seating of pols at the annual Al Smith benefit dinner for Catholic causes is a local Kremlinology." ("Anti-Catholic Slur on Schumer Has No Basis," 8/14/03)
- Jimmy Breslin: "The pope announced that gays are gravely immoral. They are put on earth by God, but this old man can put on a big pope's high hat and condemn them." ("Stranger Isn't Needed," 8/3/03)
- Jimmy Breslin: The bishops "strut around with these big crosses hanging on chains around their necks. Also on that chain they might hang a photo, a new one every week, of a child molested by one of their priests."

(*"What a Church Should Be," 7/27/03*)

- *Dick Ryan: "Postpone, delay, stall and string along—the safe and sanctified side of silence in the Catholic Church." ("Murphy Needs to Respond to Laity Complaints," 6/26/03)*
- *Jimmy Breslin: On the clergy scandal, "Egan could care less. He only wants to protect the priests, but in reality he only wants to protect himself and his job now and the one he wants next, over in Rome." ("Royal Stench of Arrogance," 6/12/03)*
- *Sheryl McCarthy: "Hundreds, perhaps thousands of children, women, male seminarians, even nuns were sexually abused and had their lives ruined by priests, while the bishops looked the other way. They used the same tactics that are used by organized crime. ... Petty drug sellers languish in prison while the seedy bishops go free." ("Bishops, Drug Felons Show Fickleness of Justice," 6/5/03)*
- *Dick Ryan: The youth "must become actively involved with prophetic new groups such as Voice of the Faithful, which have been described as the first authentic religious order of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. ... But with the ban on Voice of the Faithful in many dioceses and the recent prohibition against priests meeting in Brooklyn, the young must be prepared to be criticized or perhaps even condemned by leaders in a church that has regressed from the Church Paralyzed of 2002 to the Church Paranoid of 2003." ("Catholic Church Needs to Hear from Its Young," 3/25/03)*
- *Dennis Duggan: Robert Rygor was the "first gay man to try to march with a banner in New York City's St. Patrick's Day parade, which is still mired in bigotry, run by dinosaurs, and tied to a church that has disgraced itself by covering up for wayward priests who sexually abused those who trusted them the most." ("Still Behind Barrier Son Fought to Break," 3/18/03)*

- *Bob Keeler: In defense of Fr. Charles Papa, accused of perusing porn sites: "A tiny minority of right-wing zealots has been waging a tenacious guerrilla struggle in the Catholic Church for years. ... They're always ready to spy, disrupt, and report to higher authority those they see as less than orthodox." ("In Sad Times for Church, the Spies Have It," 3/17/03)*
- *Jimmy Breslin telephoned the Catholic League making wild accusations. He charged that Bill Donohue was as bad as accused priest Msgr. Alan Placa. (2/12/03)*
- *Jimmy Breslin: "The district attorney of Nassau County, Denis Dillon, wrote a letter to Newsday saying that of course I was wrong about his bishop, Mansion Murphy. ... That is some public servant, Dillon; he goes around in place of doing the people's work and backbites in the name of the church. Slips around in some strange fringe organization, Opus Dei, which sounds like soapsuds but is not nearly as useful. ... For the new year, I am buying him vestments, and they will be needed because I am going to Rome and I am going to have the name officially changed to the Divine Denis." ("Fitting a DA For Divine Vestments," 12/31/02)*
- *Jimmy Breslin: "The pope of Rome, on whose watch all of this has happened, has decreed that in January they will say a right-to-life Mass. This is what the pope, stubborn old pope, and the slip-and-slide schemers around him have decided to use as a distraction from the sex scandals. They have no idea that this is a tired subject with Americans, particularly women. It can only raise their fury at an old man in a wheelchair, surrounded by fawning white-haired men in dresses, demanding to control a woman's body." ("Spirit of Holiday Stolen by the Church," 12/24/02)*
- *Paul Vitello: "What happened to turn an institution such as the Catholic Church into a virtual sanctuary for pedophiles? ... Bishops and cardinals have apologized for their failure to protect the young (after years of*

denial and dissembling) but they have never actually explained what happened, never held an extended news conference to answer questions and explain their views in simple language, never bought airtime on national TV to speak directly to the country's 61 million Catholics." ("Their Sanctuary of Silence," 12/8/02)

- Bob Keeler: "In the furor over the malfeasance of the nation's Catholic bishops in the sexual-abuse scandal, it is easy to forget their longer-term failings as teachers. Compared with the scandal, that scandal is much less sensational—almost invisible in the secular press. But it really matters." ("Catholic Bishops Fail in Their Teaching Roles," 11/18/02)
- Sheryl McCarthy: On Halloween costumes, "A Catholic priest's costume would also be a crowd pleaser this year, replete with clerical collar and lascivious grin." ("Scary Monsters Are So Passé This Halloween," (10/24/02)
- Dick Ryan: The "Vatican response is a sanctimonious sham, shielding and again hiding several of those in the hierarchy who not only allowed the scandal to fester but, far more criminal, gave license to a few ordained misfits to go out and molest little boys at will." ("The Vatican Should Honor Thy Laity," 10/22/02)
- Jimmy Breslin: "These people who protest the church are not against a religion based on Christ. They just don't want their children and grandchildren abused at choir practice." ("Faithful To Kids, Christ," 8/27/02)
- Jimmy Breslin: "That there have been no protests is because of the simple rule of this church: If you dare disagree you go to hell." ("Taking back Their Church," 7/21/02)
- Bob Keeler: "Many Catholics think that God is already answering the prayers for male, celibate priests, and the answer is: No!" ("Asides," 6/30/02)
- Jimmy Breslin: "The Catholic Church, led by unctuous, arrogant men, could easily wind up being half the size

it is now." ("Principal Stands on Her Principles," 6/23/02)

- Jimmy Breslin: "I got on a flight in Dallas and I announced, 'Boy, what fat slobbs those bishops are.'" ("Get Serious About Battle of the Bulge," 6/20/02)
- Dick Ryan: The bishops "would presumably like the Catholic Church to return to business as usual while piously suggesting that Catholics put the entire scandal out of their minds like some dirty little impure thought." ("Bishops Can't Ignore Laity's Cries for Change," 6/20/02)
- Marie Cocco: "The nation's Roman Catholic bishops needed to end the agony they'd caused themselves. They did it the way corrupt politicians who wish to cling to power inevitably do, once the spinners convince them there is no choice. The churchmen came up with a quick fix that looks pretty good on paper and may, or may not, work in practice. ... [The victims] have been twice abused, once by the men who violated their bodies and twisted their psyches, and again by the institution that refused until now to treat life-altering horrors as anything but embarrassments to be covered up. ... The number of diocesan priests in the United States has been dropping since 1965... Pick your explanation. But among those offered by church scholars is the aversion of today's young men to the vow of celibacy and the ban on marriage. Even if these were to remain pillars of the church, the shortage could be eased with the ordination of women. But the bar against women priests stands, another sex policy perpetuated no matter the consequence. " ("Zero Tolerance' Policy at Least Looks Good," 6/18/02)
- Paul Vitello: "The bishops were guilty of protecting their boys, the priests—and sacrificing children on the altar of good appearances. ... The bishops...issued no new policy regarding themselves. ... They addressed the sins of others. And then, after voting to adopt their new

rules, they stood up and applauded themselves. That apparently is the style of the church." ("Odd Notion Of Whom to Protect," 6/18/02)

- Jimmy Breslin: "The Vatican could not start the day without the money from America. And yet those in the Vatican dislike America and demand that the Catholics here live under laws that were originally written with a quill pen or on parchment, if they ever were written. Rome makes mistakes. Rome is less than forthcoming. Rome doesn't tell the truth. Yet Rome rules." ("Will Rome Ignore Dallas?" 6/16/02)
- Jimmy Breslin: "The meeting was conducted by Call to Action, a coalition of Catholics who are irritated, angered, disgusted by the way the church hierarchy has maimed their faith. ... A couple of weeks ago, [Bishop Wilton Gregory] was viewed on a stage at the Vatican. On that occasion he failed his magic class when he tried to say that the American Bishops have accomplished much when they did absolutely nothing. ... Later, the thick green wall of New York's Irish church hierarchy came out with the startling statement that priests should not abuse infants." ("Dissenters Make Their Case," 6/14/02)
- Jimmy Breslin: On Cardinal Edward Egan: "He acts as if he has done nothing to betray us with his arrogant covering up of pedophiles in Hartford [sic; Cardinal Egan was bishop of Bridgeport]; that he has not disgraced all Catholics." ("A Collection Conundrum," 5/12/02)
- Carol Richards: Comparing the clergy scandal to teacher/student sex abuse: "What distinguishes this 1997 case from those that are haunting the Catholic Church today is that the wrongdoers were caught within months and punished. And therein lies a lesson for America's cardinals as they plan their June meeting in Dallas to decide how to deal with the scandal... Once teachers lose their certification, they can no longer teach in New York. And – cardinals, please note – New York swaps

names with the 49 other states in a national clearinghouse so that bad apples can't just move and keep on abusing kids." ("Cardinals Can Learn from the Schools," 5/5/02)

- Paul Vitello: On Nassau County DA Denis Dillon: "Dillon has a constitutionally guaranteed right to his attitude about priests and the Catholic Church. But he does not necessarily have a right to bring that attitude to work as a public official charged with protecting all citizens. ... This is a don't-ask-don't-tell approach to priestly abuse. ... [The letter written by Denis Dillon to State Senate Majority Leader Joe Bruno, stating accused priests are mostly homosexuals and not pedophiles] is an interesting letter, revealing interesting assumptions about sexuality and sexual abuse, which happens to mirror church doctrine, which is probably wrong on all counts. But let that go. He cites studies. He quotes Latin. It is very erudite. But in reality, it is the letter of a church apologist, which is Denis Dillon's every right as an American to be. But he should not be in charge of investigating allegations against priests." ("The Wrong Man For This Job," 4/30/02)
- Paul Vitello: "To hire a PR firm usually requires of a client three basic conditions: to be caught dead to rights in scandal, to have lots of money and to be determined against all odds to live in denial. The church qualifies." ("The Church's PR Nightmare," 4/28/02)
- Jimmy Breslin: "And if they start getting rid of homosexuals, as they seem bent on doing, what with all these attacks by men in red hats, there will be mornings around New York when your aunt is going to have to say mass. ... In the Vatican at this hour, a room full of old men, the supposed shepherds, were plotting how to present a large lie of omission to the American people. ... The papers the cardinals worked on all day and then would try to shove down Catholic throats should be their

last." ("They Need a Lesson in Proper Confession," 4/25/02)

- Marie Cocco: According to a CBS News poll, "About half of the nation's Catholics said they believe the church today is 'out of touch' with their needs. It is not clear what that means. Out of touch on birth control? On divorce? On Women? On celibacy? Or just pedophilia?" ("Cardinals are missing a talk with their most faithful; Alas, they look inward," 4/25/02)
- Sheryl McCarthy: "The celibacy requirement is unique to Catholicism, and in no other religious group has there been a sexual abuse problem of these dimensions. Celibacy requires priests to fight powerful natural urges, and those who can't or won't do that, at the risk of facing public disgrace, prey on the people over whom they have control, which means minors." ("The Church Stumbles to Lay Blame on Gays," 4/25/02)
- Paul Vitello: "The pope says nothing about the role of his cardinals and his bishops...in allowing 'the abuse of the young' to flourish throughout the world." ("Holy See Still Has Its Blinders On," 4/25/02)
- Jimmy Breslin: "These cardinals will say anything, cling to any piece of driftwood and hide anywhere, but never mention that the problem is in their lying, covering up their people as they do so. ... Rather than accountability, the cardinals yesterday seemed to spend much time on the 'one strike' rule for priests involved in sex abuse. Fourteen or 16 or so white-haired unmarried men defining sex and the family for us. Wonderful." ("Cardinals Strike Out At Vatican Meeting," 4/24/02)
- Jimmy Breslin: On Pope John Paul II: "Age and illness have left him with an instinctive dislike of anything to do with women." ("Pain of Abused Lost in Wisps of Vatican Fog," 4/23/02)
- Dennis Duggan: "The mob is not the Catholic Church, and no one wants to suggest that. But there is a lesson to

be learned here. The similarities are inescapable when you look at two ancient, far-flung organizations historically controlled by local bosses who report only to a distant leader. ... The pope has been far more concerned with what he regards as the evil of abortion, so far directing much of his passion toward children yet to be born and not those being victimized by the fathers of their churches." ("This Thing of Theirs Has Gone Too Far," 4/17/02)

- Jimmy Breslin: Pope John Paul II "called the cardinals to Rome because on his best days I don't think he ever knew where America was. ... The pope dislikes this country, as do all the bitter little old Italian men surrounding him. The pope and his lackeys see New York as sinful." ("Bishop Breslin Seizes the Day," 4/16/02)
- Sheryl McCarthy: "All the old, self-serving men in the Catholic Church who, while sparks of sexual abuse by the priests in their charge were flickering all around them, bobbed and weaved and hid the evidence, and fiddled until now the whole church is going up in flames. ... [The bishops] run a huge bureaucracy that's more concerned with protecting its reputation and hiding ugly secrets than with the pain of the children and teenagers who were picked off by these priests, and of their families." ("Church Needs to Do Some Serious Spring Cleaning," 4/15/02)
- Jimmy Breslin: "This is the largest institution on earth, and it is in the most trouble in its modern history. A few women could have saved them, but it is an all-male institution that hates and fears women." ("Of Mortality And Morality," 4/11/02)
- Paul Vitello: "To date, no bishop, no cardinal and no pope has made a real address to the victims of the untold number of criminal Catholic priests who were shuffled around the country—for decades—to new fields of criminal opportunity. All to spare the church the serious work of self-examination." ("Unbelievable Noise

in Church," 3/26/02)

- Ellis Henican: On the actions of Church leaders: "Hide. Avoid. Stay Quiet. Issue the flattest possible platitudes. 'Mysterium iniquitatis!' Pope John Paul II finally roared from Rome yesterday." ("Doleful Book Of Revelation," 3/22/02)
- Jimmy Breslin: "I qualify as the next bishop because I am not a pedophile. ... The loyal parishioners will not have to worry about Bishop Breslin chasing little boys. He hates them and they hate him. Nor will he stalk women." ("You can just kiss my ring," 3/21/02)
- Jimmy Breslin: "[Cardinal] Egan was in the cathedral pulpit at the annual St. Patrick's Day Mass. His homily suggested that he was numb. He cloaked himself in the firefighters and cops and everybody else in the World Trade Center catastrophe to keep the word pedophile out of all minds. ... The man betrayed Catholics, and the Irish, and he puts on his red hat. ... [Nell McCafferty, a friend of Breslin's] called to say, 'I wanted to give [Cardinal Egan] a kiss and tell him I'm gay and marching right along and how are you with the pedophiles? Oh, and we just passed an abortion bill in Ireland. You are losing the whole thing.'" ("A Betrayal of Catholics, Irish," 3/17/02)
- Jimmy Breslin: "This is the church that has the confessional box as one of its core beliefs, and yet the bishops and cardinals stand out on the steps and defend, deny, dispute, lie, hide, bury and omit. ... Either the pedophiles were this way before they entered the priesthood, finding it a good place to hide their faults, or they were twisted by the doctrine of celibacy. " ("Celibacy Doesn't Stand a Prayer," 3/14/02)
- Sheryl McCarthy: "Because the church hierarchy, from the pope on down to the bishops, has conspired to cover up these scandals and keep the offending priests in circulation, the church's credibility has been badly damaged." ("Catholics Must Examine Crisis in

*Priesthood," 3/14/02)*

- *Carol Richards: On voucher schools: "They're Catholic schools, not Muslim, and the girls wear cute plaid skirts, not graceful head scarves—but the gimmick that advocates cite for their supposed constitutionality is that vouchers can be used at any nonpublic school and so don't violate the First Amendment ban on establishment of a religion. It is ironic that the pitch for vouchers has reached the nation's highest court just as Americans have been made forcefully aware by the September 11 terrorist attacks that the religious indoctrination of school children can breed poisonous hatred." ("State Shouldn't Subsidize Religious Schools," 3/10/02)*
- *Paul Vitello: On Nassau County DA Denis Dillon's Catholicism, "This is Enron asking Arthur Andersen to investigate its books." ("A Crime Hardly on the Record," 3/10/02)*
- *Jimmy Breslin: "The priests and bishops around here form a white conservative church that speaks in whispers against capital punishment, if at all, because they really want it. Then they roar against abortion and even birth control. ... But the speed and ease with which you bring the cardinal and his associates out when the matter is about women is an indictment of a church of men who are either bald or white-haired and who either don't know or don't care a wit about women." ("They've Lost Touch with Jesus' Ways," 2/7/02)*

### **Contributors:**

- *Seth Armus, professor of history, St. Joseph's College: "As a historian, I am wary of proclaiming about the legacy of a still-ruling pope. One need only remember Pius XII, a hero at the time of his death in 1958 who today is held in rather lower esteem. One wonders, in particular, about how history will regard preaching against condoms in AIDS-ravaged Africa." ("A*

*Global Champion of All of Humanity," 10/15/03)*

- *Jacqueline Burt Wang, freelance writer: "I left the faith myself. Part of me wanted to shake some sense into the reverent folks around me, list every misdeed of the Catholic Church in chronological order and stop them from turning a blind eye to the flaws of their creed." ("This Believer Reached Her Statute of Limitations," 9/23/03)*
- *Fenton Johnson, author and visiting professor, University of California: "The struggles of...gays and lesbians everywhere are less religious than political, which is both troubling and inspiring. Troubling because the far right has so successfully appropriated Jesus' story and the label 'Christian' that these are in danger of losing altogether their connections to their roots. But inspiring because they present us with the challenge to reclaim Jesus and his message." ("On Gay Issues, 'Right' Has Stolen Christianity," 8/4/03)*
- *Caitlin Marinelli, High School student: "I know the church hierarchy protected pedophile priests with the same fervor that they protected Nazi war criminals.... Church history is replete with anti-Semitism." ("It's Ignorance," 7/7/03)*
- *Bill Nemitz, columnist, Portland Press Herald: On Cardinal Law's resignation: "Did the prospect of financial ruin push Rome's well-insulated panic button in a way the litany of unspeakable sins—beasts, disguised as priests, preying on the most vulnerable among their flocks—somehow could not? Was it the criminal justice system? Did the vision of Law sitting before a Massachusetts grand jury (or, even worse, a trial jury) persuade his superiors that earthly justice has at last trumped papal infallibility?" ("After Cardinal Law, The Church Quakes," 12/15/02)*
- *Jack Miles, author and senior advisor to president of J. Paul Getty Trust: "In October 1962, when Pope John XXIII convened the Second Vatican Council, millions of*

*Catholics hoped for a change in the teaching that holds abortion as a crime equivalent to murder and artificial birth control a crime equivalent to abortion.” (“The Church Needs New Direction,” 5/6/02)*

- *Kevin Farrell, freelance writer: “The good priests of your youth are forgotten, and all you’re left with is a revulsion, a nausea, over self-righteous hypocrites who never opted for women priests in the rectory (which almost anybody would forgive compared to the felonies of pedophilia) but who chose to attack children.” (“School Days of Scowling Nuns, Smiling Priests,” 5/1/02)*
- *Mark D. Jordan, professor in the Religion Department of Emory University: “The Catholic Church is and has long been both loudly homophobic and intensely homoerotic. Our public discussions of priestly sexuality won’t make any progress until we can begin to talk about the homoeroticism written into Catholic imagination and its institutions.” (“The Forbidden Question,” 4/28/02)*
- *Nell Merlino, representative from the Ms. Foundation: “And when it comes to women and girls being heard, some very powerful men are still not listening. The Catholic Church, which bars women from leadership, is spinning out of control with multi-million dollar sex scandals across the United States and around the globe.” (“Ten Years Later, Girls Still Need Their Own Day,” 4/18/02)*
- *Laura Ahearn, author and executive director of Parents For Megan’s Law: “In this century, we have the Catholic Church being resistant to the reporting of child abuse. It claims that such reporting might compromise the sacramental seal of confession. Just as physicians were previously resistant to putting children’s safety first, the Catholic Church is doing the same. And Nassau County District Attorney Denis Dillon is in the church’s corner. ... The Catholic Church and any other clergy cannot be exempt because that leaves children too vulnerable and puts the church above the law. Mandated*

reporting for clergy doesn't go far enough. If we really want to put children first, we will require any people in pastoral roles in any places of worship to be licensed by the state so they can be carefully monitored in their roles with children—as other professionals are.” (“Society Must Put Children’s Safety First,” 4/16/02)

Part II: Long Island Bishop William F. Murphy

January 2002-December 2003

### **Columnists**

- Dick Ryan: “The bishop’s response to three long evenings of troubling questions about agonizing issues are at best bland and disingenuous and at worst condescending and coldly hypocritical. ... And that is also why his 8,000-word exercise should be the last straw for outraged Catholics who are now officially leaderless and who, along with the priests and the national hierarchy, must begin to take it to another level if the church is to survive the scandal of countless priest predators and the shenanigans of a few bitter old men. ... Unless [Bishop Murphy] has the grace, and good sense, to step down and walk away from all of it, the only way he can do any true shepherding is to come down from the tower, drop the innocuous PR statements and talk openly and honestly, face to face, with all of the people.” (“Bishop’s Response to Questions Is More PR,” 11/18/03)
- Jimmy Breslin: Pope John Paul II “has ignored the monstrous scandals of priests attacking children in thousands of cases in America. Only rotting at the top can explain, locally, William Mansion Murphy in Long Island. The Vatican doesn’t care. The faithful here believe silence is the easiest way. Meanwhile, Murphy is going to be infamous forever as the man who came down from Boston, the home of pedophiles he was supposed to

supervise, and threw nuns out of a building and set up a castle for himself. He lives forever as Mansion Murphy through a book that has been written, a stage play under way and a probable movie about him." ("Mystery That Can't be Divined," 10/19/03)

- Dick Ryan: "When he's not silencing his priests or distancing himself from his parishioners, Bishop William Murphy occasionally indulges in some classic church speak." ("Let's Not Misinterpret What Catholics Desire," 9/30/03)
- Jimmy Breslin: "[Bishop Thomas] Daily came down here from Boston with William 'Mansion' Murphy, both hideous failures in the sex scandals. ... And Mansion Murphy is the outgoing bishop of Rockville Centre. If he had any shame, he would be out of here by nightfall." ("Stranger Isn't Needed," 8/3/03)
- Jimmy Breslin: "How do you like it if you're a Catholic and they make your bishop the central figure in a report on pedophiles? ... I cannot understand why, today, right now Mansion Murphy of Rockville Centre dares to remain on church grounds after all he has done to place children in jeopardy." ("What A Church Should Be," 7/27/03)
- Jimmy Breslin: On Bishop Murphy's residence: "The kitchen cost something like \$220,000, the money for which came from such collections of the faithful in the parishes of the diocese as the Bishop's Appeal. 'Send money to keep Mansion Murphy eating big thick roast beef!'" Newsday made two corrections to this article. Breslin reported that the luncheon took place at "Mansion Murphy's dining room," when in fact it did not. He said there was a Franciscan in attendance, and that it occurred on Ascension Thursday. It was a Dominican in attendance, and it occurred on a Saturday. " ("Royal Stench of Arrogance," 6/12/03)
- Dick Ryan: "If Catholics and their priests are to be truly 'catholic' and 'church' in the profoundly honest

meaning of those two words, they must first avoid the two extremes of being obsessed with Bishop Murphy and his behavior or ignoring him as just another statue in church or part of the furniture. Instead, they must forgive him for some of his stubborn truculence in the face of so much pain." ("Needs Priest-Parishioner Partnership," 5/15/03)

- Jimmy Breslin: "His career in his church consists of being a central figure in the largest scandal the American Catholic Church has had, with priests as pedophiles and bishops as pimps..." ("Betrayed by a Family Friend," 2/13/03)
- Dick Ryan: "I'll say this for the 2003 Bishop's Annual Appeal that arrived in the mail last week from Bishop William Murphy of the Diocese of Rockville Centre: The timing is all wrong. Mailed out one year after the first revelations of rampant child abuse in the priesthood, the timing has all the sensitivity of an ant. ... I will be sending my 'appeal' money to my pastor...because pastors and their priests shouldn't have to be penalized for the evasiveness or shoddy bookkeeping of a few bishops. ... Perhaps if Bishop Murphy converted his residence into a homeless shelter or a hospice for AIDS patients, some of that old trust might be restored." ("Diocese Money Appeal Doesn't Merit Support," 1/14/03)
- Jimmy Breslin: Murphy "threw nuns out and the diocese spent—what, \$5 million?—to make over the place, including creating personal living quarters out of the top floor of the huge, great former convent. He could have put about three dozen apartments in there for people to live, but he wants to be alone. ... Mansion Murphy told somebody I know who works for him that there was a big shipment of china and glasses for his dinner parties coming and he didn't want it delivered directly to his mansion. He said this was because Breslin goes through his garbage." ("Fitting a DA for Divine Vestments," 12/31/02)

- Jimmy Breslin: Bishop Murphy "has just spent \$5 million and more to rebuild his surroundings, including a full floor of a building that once was a convent but now is the place where he keeps a \$210,000 kitchen and a wine cooler of red and white at different temperatures, the better to entertain. ... The bishop is one of those who stole the spirit out of all of this and all other days of a Catholic's life. Because of this, even on this holiday, the name of the bishop is Mansion Murphy" ("Spirit of Holiday Stolen by Church," 12/24/02)
- Jimmy Breslin: "While Mansion Murphy's mansion is extraordinarily expensive, the Diocese of Rockville Centre spent untold amounts on secret payments to victims of sexual abuse by priests. ... Just about all of this came from the collection basket, the money of people who get up in the morning and earn it." ("Out In The Cold As Wine Chills," 11/24/02)
- Jimmy Breslin: "In honor of Christ, Mansion Murphy has a mansion that has room for 36 apartments. ... The building was once a convent. He threw out the nuns to make room for himself. ... Christ walked on foot. Mansion Murphy likes cars. Rather than have one bishop's car, he has several cars so that he can have auto relay races with himself. Sensational! ... He was at the bishops conference in Washington. The usual 400 white-haired old men in black dresses tried making rules about child molestation. Mansion Murphy was heard. He asked if any new guidelines would mean that he was legally and financially responsible for sexual molestation cases out of his diocese. That is exactly what he cared about. There are a lot of poor people who were hurt by priests under his direction here and in Boston but the last thing on his mind is a victim." ("At Home In His Greed," 11/17/02)
- Jimmy Breslin: "The bishop in Rockville Centre, Murphy, makes a high art of foolishness. He is rebuilding a great former convent, a place that could hold 36

apartments, into his residence. He spends fortunes of parishioners' money to rebuild the place. He is criticized for greed, and meets this with a remarkable lack of shame." ("Church Gets It Wrong Again," 10/1/02)

- Jimmy Breslin: "The bishop of the diocese, William Murphy, refused to allow this group of Catholics [Voice of the Faithful] to use a Catholic church...Murphy is one of the three Irish bishops down from New England who run the New York area. All arrived with questionable backgrounds in handling the sex cases. ... Murphy has grabbed the huge convent building, chasing the nuns out to anywhere they can find." ("An Appeal to the Bishop," 9/15/02)
- Dick Ryan: "Whether its next meeting is held at Shea Stadium or the roof of a Home Depot, the Voice of the Faithful on Long Island is not about to be shut up or shut out. But it would be sad indeed if the only things shut were the minds of some bishops who still cling feverishly to the waning glory days of pomp and power within the hierarchy. And sadder still if Bishop William Francis Murphy, ordained shepherd, truly believes that his flock is the enemy." ("Bishop's Meeting Ban Can't Silence LI Flock," 8/14/02)
- Bob Keeler: On Bishop Murphy's plan to invite Nigerian nuns to New York to pray for vocations: "Now the bishop has chosen to fly to Nigeria to pursue his vision, instead of attending this weekend's celebration by Catholic Charities: people living out the Gospel by serving the poor. His priorities seem misplaced." ("Asides," 6/30/02)
- Jimmy Breslin: "As for Bishop Murphy of Long Island, the new garage behind his castle at St. Agnes Cathedral in Rockville Centre is almost done. Soon, a fleet of cars will have a roof. His name forever shall be Mansion Murphy." ("Dissenters Make Their Case," 6/14/02)
- Jimmy Breslin: "With Law going, the three men around here, Cardinal Egan in Manhattan, Bishop Daily in

Brooklyn and Bishop Murphy in Rockville Centre, should get plane tickets. Daily and Murphy were in Boston with Law at the time that pedophiles were transferred from one parish to another." ("The Hierarchy of Decency," 5/19/02)

- Dick Ryan: On Bishop Murphy's hiring of a PR spokesman: "Bishop Murphy has shunted his public relations staff aside and gone for the glamour name. So it is obvious that he is trying to manipulate, instead of communicate, in fixing the enormous credibility gap that now exists in the church." ("Diocese Should Tell Truth, Without PR Spin," 5/15/02)
- Jimmy Breslin: On pedophile John Geoghan: "Each time there was a complaint about him, the bosses of the Boston archdiocese, Law and Bishop Thomas Daily and Bishop William Murphy...moved Geoghan to another parish." The following day Newsday issued a correction noting Bishop Murphy has said he was not aware of church leaders shifting Geoghan from parish to parish. ("Bishop Breslin: Time to Step In," 5/9/02)
- Jimmy Breslin: "Straight east, out in Rockville Centre, the bishop, Murphy, has hired a public relations man, Howard Rubenstein, for what I'm told is at least \$250,000 for a couple of months to make him look good after all the bad he's done. That figure is not as high as what Murphy has them spending on his new residence, an entire four-story building that could be used for 36 apartments, and a four-car garage to go with it." ("Close to God in Bushwick," 4/30/02)
- Jimmy Breslin: "The bishop, Murphy, was just here from Boston, where he has been in charge of assigning priests. The major part of that work appears to have been the shifting of pedophiles around as if they were substitutes in a game." ("Greed That Can Move Mountains," 4/18/02)
- Jimmy Breslin: "Thomas V. Daily and William Murphy, two of our bishops, got into hideous trouble over covering

up pedophiles. Daily and Murphy transferred a priest named Geoghan each time he drew sex abuse charges in a parish. They transferred him four times, the last to a parish where he was in charge of altar boys and two other youth groups." ("A Betrayal of Catholics, Irish," 3/17/02)

- Jimmy Breslin: The "Rev. John Geoghan...seemed to be the personal charge of Bishop Murphy. Geoghan was transferred from parish to parish in order to cover up his crimes..." ("Celibacy Doesn't Stand a Prayer," 3/14/02)

### **Recent Catholic League Material on Newsday**

- IS NEWSDAY ANTI-CATHOLIC? VOTE IN CATHOLIC LEAGUE POLL (4/28/04)
  - LAST-DITCH ATTEMPT TO SMEAR BISHOP MURPHY (2/11/04)
  - CHECKMATE: NEWSDAY AND VOICE OF THE FAITHFUL (1/12/04)
  - CATHOLIC MALCONTENTS ATTACK BISHOP MURPHY (12/4/03)
  - 6,000 LONG ISLAND CATHOLICS SIGN PETITION IN SUPPORT OF BISHOP MURPHY 9/25/03)
  - CATHOLICS RALLY TO SUPPORT BISHOP MURPHY (7/29/03)
  - GANGING UP ON BISHOP MURPHY (7/24/03)
  - JIMMY BRESLIN SEEKS TO MALIGN CATHOLIC LEAGUE (2/12/03)
  - D.A. SPOTA, GRAND JURY AND NEWSDAY RESIST INCLUSIVE MANDATORY REPORTING BILL (2/11/03)
  - LONG ISLAND PASTORS NOTIFIED OF NEWSDAY'S DEFENSE OF BRESLIN'S BIGOTRY AND DISTORTIONS (12/26/02)
  - NEWSDAY'S SHERYL MCCARTHY: CLASSIC BIGOT (10/24/02)
  - SHOULD PRACTICING CATHOLICS HOLD PUBLIC OFFICE? (4/30/02)
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# Maligning Mel Gibson

*March 2003 – Present*

*The following quotes represent some of the most unfair statements on Mel Gibson and his film, "The Passion of the Christ." The selections in each category are in reverse chronological order.*

## **Organizational Responses:**

### **Ad Hoc Committee of Catholic and Jewish Scholars \***

#### **America, April 5, 2004; Philip Cunningham:**

“‘The Passion of the Christ’ unquestionably fails to follow the official Catholic teaching on biblical interpretation and the presentation of Jews and Judaism. ...

“Catholics who take seriously Pope John Paul II’s commitment, made during his visit to the Western Wall in Jerusalem in March 2000, “to genuine fellowship with the people of the Covenant” should ask whether it is acceptable for a filmmaker—even though he repeats the teaching of the Council of Trent that Christ died for the sins of all humanity—to combine scenes from the four Gospel accounts with many unbiblical elements so that the malice of the Jewish characters is magnified.

“In a church whose highest leadership has prayed for God’s forgiveness for exactly those sins over the past millennium and whose teachings repudiate such practices, the answer can only be no. The new wine of post-Vatican II teaching cannot be contained in the old wineskins of the pre-Vatican II Passion play that is the film ‘The Passion of the Christ.’”

#### **Sun-Sentinel (FL), March 22, 2004; Sister Mary C. Boys:**

“He [Mel Gibson] has featured the single-most divisive issue

in Jewish-Christian relations. ... He has taken this potent, dangerous issue and put fire to it. ... This is the religious equivalent of road rage."

**Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, March 7, 2004; "Pro and Con: Is Movie Anti-Semitic?; Film perpetuates the pain," by the Rev. John T. Pawlikowski:**

"The main story line of Mel Gibson's 'The Passion of the Christ' focuses on an evil cabal of Jews that relentlessly pursues Jesus until it can blackmail a weak-kneed Pontius Pilate into issuing a writ of execution. ...

"Unfortunately, the version Gibson brings to life on the screen has proved toxic over the centuries—leading to the persecution and killing of millions of Jews at the hands of Christians. ...

"Far too many Christian leaders and Gibson himself seem totally oblivious to the pain and suffering such portrayals have inflicted on Jews in the course of history. Christians who react favorably to Gibson's film are shamefully evading their religious responsibility."

**Baltimore Sun, February 25, 2004; Father John T. Pawlikowski:**

"Mr. Gibson has continued to blame the Jewish leadership in defiance of this scholarly and ecclesial consensus. ...

"This text [Matthew 27:25] has been used over the centuries by Christians to keep Jews miserable and marginal in society and at times even to justify their deaths. Mr. Gibson included this questionable text in his original script, deleted it because he claimed Jews would have his throat, put it back and then removed it from the final version. Such insensitivity to how much suffering this text has caused Jews over the centuries is deeply disturbing.

"The film also raises a question about Mr. Gibson's ultimate

agenda in making it.

"It is now clear that for the past several years he has been campaigning against the reforms introduced by the Second Vatican Council and against modern biblical scholarship. So the film also presents a challenge to the basic teachings of Vatican II, including its historic declaration on the church and the Jewish people."

**Forward (NY), February 13, 2004; Father John T. Pawlikowski:**

"The changes [cutting Matthew 27:25 from the film] don't mean anything unless the fundamental theme is changed. Gibson has to acknowledge that the Jews didn't kill Christ."

**Sun-Sentinel (FL), February 7, 2004; Father John T. Pawlikowski:**

"The Passion can be a tool for bringing Jews and Christians closer." But the Passion movie doesn't bring us one iota in that direction."

**The Jewish Week (NY), December 26, 2003; Father John T. Pawlikowski:**

[Fr. Pawlikowski, who has continuously responded to prelates' endorsements of the film by demanding nothing short of papal approval, now comments on the pope's approval of the film.]  
"...It is important to understand that this is hardly a magisterial pronouncement from the Pope that is above critique. *I remain, as do others, very skeptical as to whether this ailing Pope was fully briefed about the concerns we and others have expressed*" [emphasis added].

**The Jewish Week (NY), December 26, 2003; Michael Cook:**

"The issue, I submit, is not Mel Gibson's movie at all but the future of Catholic-Jewish trust. Either the Vatican and/or the bishops are not tuned into this reality, or they don't care, or they do care but Jews are simply not as high on the

priority list as Jews had hoped.

"...The question to be posed to the Bishops and the Vatican and the Pope is not, 'Say, is the movie great, or what?' but rather, 'If this film poses the threat of unraveling five decades of advances in Christian-Jewish relations, then what shall we say about it in that light?'

"...In their own sense of abandonment, Jews may very well abandon the venture of Catholic-Jewish understanding [and turn toward Evangelicals] ...a move I predict has already begun to spread nationwide.

"...As many have said to me, 'You know, it's just like what happened to us in the Six-Day War. Evangelicals may want to end us by converting us, but at least they won't abandon us.'"

**Cybercast News Service, November 7, 2003; Sister Mary C. Boys:**

"Boys noted that the movie is already 'dividing evangelicals and Catholics—Catholics and Catholics, and Christians and Jews.

"'I don't believe that [given the divisive] result that he [Mel Gibson] could claim that the Holy Spirit is behind this.

...

"'Our concern is what happens after people see the film? Will anti-Semitic actions happen or will attitudes against the Jews be exacerbated by this film?'"

**Cybercast News Service, November 7, 2003; Paula Fredriksen:**

"Paula Fredriksen ... believes Gibson's production will prove to be "an inflammatory movie.' ...

"Fredriksen said the movie continues the 'toxic tradition of blaming the Jews for the death of Jesus.

"'A movie like this could very possibly elicit violence

against Jews.'"

**National Catholic Register, October 5, 2003; "The Passion: Still a Sign of Contradiction," by Barbara R. Nicolosi:**

"One of the scholars who started all the controversy by publicly lambasting an early version of the screenplay told me emphatically, 'The New Testament is undeniably anti-Semitic.'"

**The New Republic, September 29, 2003; Correspondence by Paula Fredriksen:**

"...Gibson has 'every right to decide for himself' how to present his movie. But does he have a 'right' to misrepresent what his movie is? Gibson has repeatedly claimed that 'The Passion' is both scripturally faithful (an 'accurate' rendering of the gospel material) and historically accurate (true to a plausible reconstruction of early first-century Jerusalem). In fact, it is neither. That is the problem. ...

"Finally, as the chronology in my article argued and as the four-minute trailer for the movie and subsequent reports from viewers have confirmed, the script that we saw was the script that Gibson shot from. That is how I know what the movie is about—though I am sure that the grisly makeup and Gibsonian gore make the visual experience even more lurid than was the script itself. ...

"I am still counting on the people in the pew who, when they view Gibson's movie, will not recognize any gospel known to them."

**The Jewish Week, September 19, 2003; Sister Mary C. Boys:**

"'One of the problems is people are going to see this film and are going to conclude that's the way it is because they don't know anything different, it's part of the religious illiteracy in our country,' Sister Boys said. 'We really have to find ways to educate them about interpreting Scripture more

thoughtfully.'”

**The Times Union (NY), September 19, 2003; Sister Mary C. Boys:**

“‘It’s not understanding,’ she said of Gibson’s script. ‘He wouldn’t know a scholar if he ran into one.’”

**The New Yorker, September 15, 2003; Paula Fredriksen:**

“He [Mel Gibson] doesn’t even have a Ph.D. on his staff.”

**The Evangelist (Diocese of Albany, NY), September 11, 2003; Sister Mary C. Boys:**

“The average Christian goes to see this film, which is going to be incredibly graphic, and [thinks] the people that do this to Jesus are the Jews. This does not do well for Christian-Jewish relations.”

**National Public Radio, “All Things Considered,” September 3, 2003; Sister Mary C. Boys:**

“Will this film exacerbate divisions between Christians and Jews? Will this film exacerbate differences between traditionalist Catholics and those who see themselves more in the mainstream? Will this film exacerbate divisions between, say, Catholics and evangelicals? And I think if it does any of those, then I find it difficult to believe that the Holy Spirit is at work.”

**Philadelphia Inquirer, August 21, 2003; Paula Fredriksen:**

“There is no plot, no character development, no subtlety. The bad guys are way bad, the good guys are way good.”

**Associated Press, August 9, 2003; Sister Mary C. Boys:**

“For too many years, Christians have accused Jews of being Christ-killers and used that charge to rationalize violence.... This is our fear.”

**Kansas City Star, August 9, 2003; Sister Mary C. Boys:**

"Our fear is that if the film is based on the script we read—which is possible but not necessarily the case—it could promote anti-Semitic sentiments."

**Beliefnet.com, August 7, 2003; Amy-Jill Levine:**

"I don't know if the film is ant-Semitic—I have only seen a version of the script—but the reaction to the scholars' objections could be interpreted as anti-Semitic. ...

"Alas, fidelity, accuracy, and sensitivity were all lacking in the script I saw for Mr. Gibson's production."

**ABC, "Good Morning America," August 5, 2003; Paula Fredriksen:**

"I don't plan to pay money to see it. He's gotten enough of my time for free already."

**Fox News Network, "The O'Reilly Factor," August 5, 2003; Paula Fredriksen:**

"...I saw a later script, not an early script. So I do have a sense of what the film is about. The point is how you take that. We were just talking about the Jewish temple guard assisting Roman soldiers in arresting Jesus.

"And if you then say that the entire incentive for the action is at the motivation of the chief priest, and that the chief priest is leaning on Pilate, so that Pilate is very anxious, of course, to keep his Jewish subjects happy—I mean, it's a colonial power. Pilot doesn't have to run his office on popularity.

"Then you can foreground and overemphasizing you can foreground and overemphasize and distort [sic], and end up having all the heavy lifting done by the Jewish high priest and having it, it ends up being a fight between Judaism and Christianity."

**MSNBC, "Buchanan & Press," August 4, 2003; Paula Fredriksen:**

"I think it's inflammatory."

**The New York Times, August 2, 2003; Sister Mary C. Boys:**

"When we read the screenplay, our sense was this wasn't really something you could fix. All the way through, the Jews are portrayed as bloodthirsty. We're really concerned that this could be one of the great crises in Christian-Jewish relations."

**The New York Times, August 2, 2003; Father John T. Pawlikowski:**

"This was one of the worst things we had seen in describing responsibility for the death of Christ in many many years."

**The New Republic, July 28, 2003 – August 4, 2003, "Mad Mel," by Paula Fredriksen:**

"We knew that we were working against his [Mel Gibson's] enthusiasm, his utter lack of knowledge....

"Jews are the objects of anti-Semitism, but Catholics and other Christians, inspired by Gibson's movie, could well become its agents. (Indeed, on the evidence of the anti-Semitic hate mail that we have all received since being named as critics of Gibson's screenplay, this response is already in play.) ...

"*When* violence breaks out, Mel Gibson will have a much higher authority than professors and bishops to answer to." [emphasis added]

**Dramatizing the Death of Jesus: Issues that Have Surfaced in Media Reports about the Upcoming Film, The Passion; by Mary C. Boys, Philip A. Cunningham, Lawrence E. Frizzell, John T. Pawlikowski, June 17, 2003:**

"We understood from the outset of our review of the script that our report did not represent an official statement of the United States Catholic Conference of Bishops...

"Anyone who composes a script for a dramatic presentation of the death of Jesus must draw upon four distinct passion narratives in the four gospels in the New Testament. One cannot assume that by simply conforming to the New Testament that antisemitism [sic] will not be promoted."

**New York Post, June 13, 2003; Mel Doesn't Stick to the Scripture in Crime of 'Passion' by Andrea Peyser:**

"Dr. Paula Fredriksen of Boston University said: 'Jesus was Jewish. But with this story, it's easy to forget.'"

"Gibson has said his film was to tell the true story of Jesus' death.

"There is still time, Mel, to tell the truth."

**The Jewish Week, March 28, 2003; Sister Mary Boys:**

"As a member of the Catholic Church, I regard his thinking as bizarre and dangerous, and suggest that Jews judge them similarly. ...

"We seem to have at best fringe Catholics if not heretical with ... a tragically twisted understanding of the relationship between Judaism and Christianity. It is compounded by the arrogance great wealth makes possible in producing a film that will reopen wounds of history."

**The Jewish Week, March 28, 2003; Michael Cook:**

"Dr. Michael Cook, a professor of Judaeo-Christian Studies at Hebrew Union College, said, 'Gibson's film may reverse progress the Christian community has made' in reinterpreting anti-Jewish New Testament passages. ...

“‘Were Jesus today to witness the hatred exuded and directed against fellow Jews by this film, might Jesus not construe the theaters showing it as modern ‘temples’ most in need of his cleansing?’”

**The Jewish Week, March 28, 2003; Rev. John Pawlikowski:**

“Father John Pawlikowski ... said he is ‘naturally quite upset at the prospect of this film. ... Those who might see the film without much or any background in recent biblical interpretation will be terribly misled.’”

**American Jewish Committee**

**Washington Post, February 28, 2004; Rabbi James Rudin, senior interreligious adviser:**

[Commenting on Mel Gibson’s statement that he prays for Jews]  
“I know what ‘praying for’ means—converting Jews to Christianity. We feel put upon and say, ‘Enough. After 2,000 years, isn’t it clear it isn’t going to happen?’ ... We have a perfected religion that doesn’t need an addition or change. It stands on its own.”

**CNN “Live From...” February 25, 2004; Rabbi James Rudin:**

“Mel Gibson could have made a thoroughly Christian Passion play without beating up on the Jews, vilifying my religion, my people, as he’s done. It’s also a sadomasochistic film.”

**Fox News Channel “Hannity and Colmes,” February 18, 2004; Rabbi James Rudin:**

“But the problems for me in my judgment go much deeper than just the violence, which I consider gratuitous. And one of the problems is that it’s really in a line of medieval passion plays, which have historically presented Jews and Judaism in a negative light. ...

“Inherently, it is a passion play that presents toxic Jewish,

anti-Jewish images, stereotypes, and caricatures.”

**Boston Globe, February 6, 2004; Rabbi David Elcott, director of interreligious affairs:**

“But the real concern is that the movie pits Jesus and his immediate followers against everyone else, perfect goodness against satanic evil. In so doing, “The Passion” has the potential to challenge the core values of democratic pluralism and mutual religious respect that undergird our country.”

**Chicago Tribune, February 6, 2004; Emily Soloff, director, Chicago Chapter:**

“The sacred text of Christianity is a complex document. I’m not saying there are going to be pogroms. But we had 2,000 years of that kind of relationship. It was often not a happy relationship. You can’t expect in the last 40 years things to have been turned on their heads.”

**The Associated Press, January 22, 2004; Rabbi David Elcott:**

“‘The movie undermines the sense of community that has existed between Jews and Christians for decades,’ Elcott said. ‘This film makes it more important than ever for like-minded Christians and Jews to reassert their dedication to promoting interfaith harmony.’”

**Forward, September 26, 2003; Rabbi David Rosen, director of interreligious affairs:**

“This is distressing because there is a battle between the more traditional and the more liberal wings within the Catholic Church, and the relationship with the Jewish community has become a football in this fight.”

**The Jewish Week (NY), August 15, 2003; Rabbi James Rudin:**

“I came away very troubled because this movie as it stands has the potential to harm Christian-Jewish relations in many parts

of the world.”

**Christian Science Monitor (MA), July 10, 2003; Rabbi James Rudin, senior interreligious adviser:**

“Given that this is radioactive material – that’s the only way I can describe it—I’m urging Mr. Gibson to follow what others have done and consult prior to release.”

**Anti-Defamation League**

**Press Release, September 27, 2004; Abraham Foxman, National Director, and Rabbi Gary Bretton-Granatoor, Director of Interfaith Affairs:**

“Recently, the release of Mel Gibson’s film “The Passion of the Christ,” reasserted the anti-Semitism that derives from the work attributed to Sr. Emmerich [Bl. Anne Catherine Emmerich]. Serving as his muse, her visions guided Mr. Gibson in adding elements that do not derive from the Gospel narratives and break with the Second Vatican Council’s teachings. Among these elements include: the association of Jewish characters with the demonic, the destruction of the Second Temple, the benign portrait of Pilate, and the negative characterization of *Jewish guards and leaders*.” [Emphasis added.]

**New York Observer, March 8, 2004; Abraham Foxman, National Director:**

“Only for sadists, only for masochists could this [film] be beautiful. And for him [Mel Gibson] to say, ‘I’m doing this because God commanded me’—there’s a certain arrogance. He’s on another trip. But that’s fine, you know? It’s his money. As long as we don’t pay the price!”

**Washington Post, February 19, 2004; David Friedman, Regional Director:**

“There have been important changes in theological

understanding that this film appears to be thumbing its nose at."

**Dallas Morning News, February 7, 2004; Mark Briskman, Regional Director:**

"The issue is not about Jewish sensibility. The issue is whether this movie can be used the way Passion plays have been used historically, in a way that is hurtful to the Jewish community."

**Detroit Free Press, February 7, 2004; Abraham Foxman:**

"Over the last 2000 years, four words have fueled anti-Semitism: 'The Jews killed Christ.' ... So, we're concerned about this message wrapped up in a popular film that's couched as gospel truth and produced by a popular, creative genius.

"More people will see this film in three months than ever saw the passion plays in Europe through all the centuries. We know those plays rationalized anti-Semitic behavior. We fear this will, too."

**Orlando Sentinel (FL), February 7, 2004; Abraham Foxman:**

"Abraham Foxman, executive director of the B'nai B'rith Anti-Defamation League, said he is troubled by the campaign, which he characterized as 'a commercial crusade.' The Passion, he said, 'is not being sold as a movie. It's being sold as a religious experience, as a pilgrimage, as a way back to faith.'"

**Sun-Sentinel (FL), February 7, 2004; Abraham Foxman:**

"'The movie blames bloodthirsty Jews for Jesus' death,' said Abraham Foxman, national director of the ADL, which is conducting its national executive meeting in Palm Beach. 'And this during a time of a rise of global anti-Semitism.' ...

"The leaders acknowledged that Gibson has denied anti-Semitic

intentions; the star has often said instead that all humanity's sins were responsible for Jesus' death. 'But that's not in the movie,' Foxman said. 'What you see and hear for two hours is the Jews, the Jews, the Jews.'

**Sun-Sentinel (FL), February 7, 2004; Rabbi Gary Bretton-Granatoor:**

“(Gibson) says his film is historically and scripturally accurate, but it's not,’ he [Rabbi Bretton-Granatoor] said. ‘What happens if it goes to DVD and gets shown on youth retreats? And gets translated into Spanish and Arabic and Polish? It would turn back 40 years of Catholic-Jewish teachings.’”

**Seattle Times, February 6, 2004; ADL Fundraising Mailer, quoted by David Klinghoffer:**

“Of great concern to the Anti-Defamation League [with regard to the film] is the possibility that individuals are more likely to be targets of attack, simply because they are ‘different.’”

**Daily News (NY), January 26, 2004; Abraham Foxman:**

“He [Mel Gibson] didn't miss any chance to malign the Jews.”

**Palm Beach Post, January 25, 2004; Abraham Foxman and and Rabbi Gary Bretton-Granatoor:**

“Mr. Gibson has produced his film with willful disregard for the opinions and outreach efforts of mainstream Jewish organizations and many Catholic and Jewish scholars. These mainstream religious leaders have continued to express concern about the impact of the film and its potential to turn back the clock on decades of positive interfaith dialogue and the Vatican II Council reforms of the Catholic Church. ...

“Love and compassion are demonstrated by the Romans—only a few sadistic Romans harm Jesus and only because the Jews made

Pilate punish him. ...

"Our concern is that *The Passion of The Christ* could fuel the latent anti-Semitism that exists in the hearts of those people who hold Jews responsible for the death of Jesus, which always has been the source of Western anti-Semitism."

**Los Angeles Times, January 24, 2004; Abraham Foxman:**

"Forty years ago, we in the ADL helped the bishops to write those guidelines that permit artists to be honest about their faith without being hateful in their work. What Mel Gibson is doing is as much an attack on the Catholic Church and the Second Vatican Council as it is anything else."

**Los Angeles Times, January 23, 2004; Abraham Foxman:**

"In an interview about the film, Foxman added, '[Gibson is] hawking it on a commercial crusade to the churches of this country. That's what makes it dangerous.'" [\\*\\*](#)

**New York Times, January 23, 2004; Abraham Foxman:**

"Do I think it will trigger pogroms? I don't think it will," he said. "But will it strengthen and legitimize anti-Semitic feelings? Yes, it will. ...

"He [Foxman] said he had initially felt bad about sneaking into the showing, but later changed his mind. 'I decided yesterday, 'Why am I uncomfortable? Let him be uncomfortable,' ' he said, referring to Mr. Gibson. "For him to say, 'You can only see it if you love it?' I felt it was my moral duty to see it.'"

**Orlando Sentinel, January 23, 2004; Abraham Foxman:**

[On Foxman's participating in a viewing of "The Passion of the Christ" in Orlando under false pretenses on January 21, 2004]  
"Foxman flew into Orlando with Rabbi Gary Bretton-Granatoor, the ADL's interfaith consultant, Wednesday evening. Foxman

said the confidentiality agreement was part of Gibson's 'commercial Christian crusade' of screening the film, which opens Feb. 25, to conservative evangelical groups and making certain that only favorable comments resulted. 'This is marketing; they're hawking it.'

"Foxman and his colleague said they did not sign the agreement.

"'We consulted our counsel and were told that it's not worth the paper it's printed on,' Foxman said.

"Although he and Bretton-Granatoor bought tickets to the conference in their own names, Foxman acknowledged that they used unconventional tactics to get inside the sanctuary.

"For example, both men registered for the conference as representatives of 'The Church of Truth,' in Brooklyn, N.Y., rather than of the Anti-Defamation League, according to Michael O'Sullivan, a registration official with the conference.

"'I am sorry we had to engage in stealth tactics, but only because he forced us to,' Foxman said."

**Palm Beach Post, January 23, 2004; Abraham Foxman, National Director:**

"'Gibson is challenging the church's teaching. We must reach out and ask the Vatican and other denominations to restate their teaching on the Passion,' Foxman said."

**United Press International, January 23, 2004; Abraham Foxman:**

"'Do I think it will trigger pogroms? I don't think it will,' Foxman said. 'But will it strengthen and legitimize anti-Semitic feelings? Yes, it will.'"

**Anti-Defamation League Press Release, January 22, 2004; Abraham Foxman:**

"We were saddened and pained to find that 'The Passion of the Christ' continues its unambiguous portrayal of Jews as being responsible for the death of Jesus. There is no question in this film about who is responsible. At every single opportunity, Gibson's film reinforces the notion that the Jewish authorities and the Jewish mob are the ones ultimately responsible for the Crucifixion. ...

"Will the film trigger pogroms against Jews? Our answer is *probably* not [emphasis added]. Our concern is that 'The Passion of The Christ' could fuel latent anti-Semitism that exists in the hearts of those people who hold Jews responsible for the death of Jesus, which has always been the source of Western anti-Semitism. Its portrayal of Jews is painful to watch."

**Cox News Service, January 22, 2004; Abraham Foxman:**

"'We respect Christians who come to see it,' said Abraham Foxman, national director of the ADL. 'They were moved to tears, and some were deeply pained.

"'I don't know how many sorted out the underlying issues as they watched the film,' Foxman continued, "but time and again it kept coming back to the bloodthirsty Jews.'"

**Cybercast News Service, November 7, 2003; Abraham Foxman:**

"'I think he's infected—seriously infected—with some very, very serious anti-Semitic views. ...

"'[Gibson's] got classical anti-Semitic views.' ...

"Foxman claimed that 'hate crimes [against Jews] go up Easter week worldwide' because in many Christian churches, 'the sermon is given about the passion.'"

**Associated Press, September 19, 2003; Abraham Foxman:**

"Foxman said the actor 'entertains views that can only be

described as anti-Semitic.'"

**Daily News (NY), September 19, 2003; Abraham Foxman:**

"...Abraham Foxman of the Anti-Defamation League said signs already are ominous.

"‘We’ve been getting mail – ugly, ugly mail,’ he said. ‘If the debate has evoked such hate, what will that film do?’

"Foxman said Gibson’s recent statements—portraying himself as the target of shadowy conspiracies and “anti-Christian” newspapers—highlighted his concerns.

"‘He’s painting a portrait of an anti-Semite,’ he said. ‘This is anti-Semitic stereotyping.’"

**Daily Variety, September 19, 2003; Abraham Foxman:**

"Foxman, who has requested to see but not yet screened the film, said of the cardinal’s comments: ‘It makes the film worse, more damaging, more threatening because what we thought we had eliminated with Vatican II is coming back in a film.’

"Foxman also charged that Castrillon Hoyos was attempting to appease traditionalist Catholics. ‘It seems to be a conscious policy to bring them closer at our expense,’ he said.

"Foxman emphasized that the ADL has had a very good relationship with American Catholic officials, collaborating on interfaith initiatives designed to combat anti-Semitism.

"‘I guess we should now take this up with Rome,’ Foxman said."

**The Jewish Week, September 19, 2003; Abraham Foxman:**

"‘When you put those things together [Mel Gibson’s statements],’ said Foxman, ‘that is a portrait of an anti-Semite. To me this is classic anti-Semitism.’"

**Minnesota Public Radio, "Marketplace," September 9, 2003;**

**Abraham Foxman:**

"Can you imagine, if this film is not changed and it begins to play around the world, what—what it may possibly trigger?"

**Daily News (NY), September 7, 2003; Abraham Foxman:**

"Foxman, who survived the Holocaust because Catholic clergy baptized him to shield him from the Nazis, added, 'I think [Gibson] is on the fringes of anti-Semitism.'"

**National Public Radio, "All Things Considered," September 3, 2003; Abraham Foxman:**

"He said such things as he now understands what Jesus Christ felt like; he understands what it means to be persecuted. Well, finish that sentence. By whom? Or he says this will probably be the last film he's permitted to make. Well, who's going to stop him? It's unstated. Or he made this film and at a tremendous cost, but for some this is a great opportunity to make money. And again, he's talking about Jews, Jewish organizations."

**Houston Chronicle, August 18, 2003; letter by Mark S. Finkelstein, chair, Anti-Defamation League, Southwest Region, Houston:**

"It [the film] threatens to set back the decades of progress that has been made in inter-faith relations between Christians and Jews since the Holocaust."

**Philadelphia Inquirer, August 13, 2003; Abraham Foxman:**

"Abraham Foxman, the [Anti-Defamation League's] national director, had expressed concerns that if Gibson's 'message was tainted, [the movie] is dangerous. He is an icon. People will see this film without a guide, without their priest.'"

**Anti-Defamation League Press Release, August 11, 2003; Abraham Foxman:**

"We are deeply concerned that the film, if released in its present form, will fuel the hatred, bigotry and anti-Semitism that many responsible churches have worked hard to repudiate....

"We hope that Mr. Gibson and Icon Productions will consider modifying 'The Passion,' so that the film will be one that is historically accurate, theologically sound and free of any anti-Semitic message."

**Anti-Defamation League Press Release, August 11, 2003; Rabbi Eugene Korn, ADL Director of Interfaith Affairs:**

"Many theologically informed Catholics and Protestants have expressed the same concerns regarding anti-Semitism, and that this film may undermine Christian-Jewish dialogue and could turn back the clock on decades of positive progress in interfaith relations."

**The Sun (NY), August 4, 2003; Op-Ed, by Abraham Foxman:**

"In a world when anti-Semitism has undergone a frightening resurgence, one of the hopeful perspectives is the fact that the Church has changed so dramatically. We urge the makers of 'The Passion' to continue this important progress that has benefited Christians and Jews."

**The Washington Post, July 22, 2003; Abraham Foxman:**

"'I find this sad,' said ADL National Director Abraham Foxman, who hasn't been permitted to see the movie. 'Here's a man who appeals to the mass audience, but he feels he has to surround himself with a cordon sanitaire of people who back him theologically and maybe ideologically and will stand up and be supportive when the time comes.'"

**Christian Science Monitor (MA), July 10, 2003; Abraham Foxman:**

"We don't have the arrogance to say, 'You should make these changes,' or to censor it.... We'd just like an opportunity to sensitize him [Mel Gibson] about what history has taught us."

**New York Post, June 21, 2003; Letter, Ken Jacobson, Assoc. National Director:**

"We have good reason to be seriously concerned about Gibson's plans to retell the Passion. Historically, the Passion—the story of the killing of Jesus—has resulted in the death of Jews. "

**Daily News (NY), June 14, 2003; Myrna Shinbaum, spokeswoman:**

"'Historically, treatment of the death of Jesus and the passion has led to the death of Jews,' ADL spokeswoman Myrna Shinbaum said. 'Since Vatican II in the 1960s, Catholics and Jews have worked very hard to move away from a literal interpretation [of the New Testament]. We would hope this film wouldn't set us back.'"

**The Jewish Week, March 28, 2003; Abraham Foxman:**

"'It's very serious,' warns Abraham Foxman, national director of Anti-Defamation League. 'The 'truth' he [Mel Gibson] is talking about has been used for 2,000 years to buttress anti-Semitism and to give a rationale for persecuting Jews.'"

**Simon Wiesenthal Center**

**Los Angeles Times, February 8, 2004; Rabbi Marvin Hier, Dean:**

"I don't think the film is anti-Semitic. I think, however, it can inspire anti-Semitism around the world, by people who will view it and don't have a proper context."

**Los Angeles Times, February 8, 2004; Rabbi Marvin Hier:**

"Every Jew who appears in this film, except for the disciples of Christ, are portrayed cruelly and portrayed as a people with an almost sinister look in their eyes.... Jews who see this film, I believe, will be overwhelmingly horrified."

**Fox News Channel "Big Story Weekend Edition," February 7,**

**2004; Rabbi Marvin Hier:**

"[T]he total film is two hours. And the Jews do not have a single word of intelligence to say in the entire two hours. Except of course, those disciples of Jesus. The Jews are portrayed horribly and it's really an insult to the Jewish community. ...

"The beef is that the Jews are terribly insulted by this film and that will be the overwhelming reaction of the Jewish community."

**Chicago Tribune, February 6, 2004; Rabbi Marvin Hier:**

"This film portrays Jews in the most horrible manner I have ever seen. ...

"The Jews come across as pushy people, unkempt, with Rasputin-like features.... It is an attempt to portray all Jews as the enemy. I am not saying that synagogues are going to be burned when the film comes out, but it could poison the minds of young people who say to themselves, 'Boy what a terrible people those Jews are.'"

**CNN "CNN Live," February 6, 2004; Rabbi Marvin Hier:**

"I have never seen a more negative portrayal of Jews than in this film. I'm not talking about the high priests only, all Jews. They never have an intelligent thing to say in a two-hour film. The Romans are made to look good. The audience will only have one conclusion – if the Romans look good, with the exception of the four whippers, and the Jews look so bad, who is responsible for this terrible inhumanity inflicted on Jesus? And they will only conclude that it was the Jews collectively, which will stir anti-Semitic feelings, even if it's not immediate, all over the world. ...

"The Roman authorities, from Pontius Pilate down, the generals, the captains, were portrayed as sensitive and nice

people, with the exception of the four whippers. And there can only be one – in my view, there can only be one interpretation. At that time, the main people responsible for the terrible inhumanity inflicted on Jesus were the Jews, and that is unfair and a distorted view of history.”

**Daily Variety, January 27, 2004; Rabbi Marvin Hier:**

“It’s [a televised interview with Mel Gibson] a ploy to picture himself as a victim. No responsible Jew has made the accusation that Gibson is an anti-Semite. ...

“[The film] will engender worldwide anti-Semitism. There is no other conclusion that can be drawn from the film in which the only bad guys in the film are Jews—Jews who look like Rasputin-like characters. The good guys are even the Roman officers. The only bad Romans are the four guys who administer the whippings and (endless) torture.”

**CNN “Anderson Cooper 360°,” January 26, 2004; Rabbi Marvin Hier:**

“There’s no question the audience is going to come out there saying it was the Jews. And there we have the collective decide issue thrown up here in the 21st century.”

**CNN International “Q&A,” January 23, 2004; Rabbi Marvin Hier:**

“I think that this movie is an incendiary device that will create a faster anti-Semitism all over the world, particularly in Europe, in the Arab world, and in South America. And I say this as a filmmaker myself. I’ve made six films. And I say that this film will engender hate against the Jewish people. ...

“It [the film] worships a Jew, but it persecutes his people. It is a horrible presentation of the Jewish people. Even the casting, which I’m sure the director had a hand in, every Jew in this film from his eyes to the way his mouth, to the frowning, they look like Rasputin or the devil incarnates.

It's a horrible portrayal of Jews, and I think that many Christians will walk out on this film after they see the horrendous torture scenes. There is just no excuse for making a film like this.

"This is not the first film on Jesus that has been made. All the others have never crossed the line that Mel Gibson's 'Passion' has. ...

"I am not going to be used in some merchandising, or because of publicity, simply say, 'Let's be quiet and watch the Jews be portrayed horribly. Watch them be portrayed collectively as Christ killers.' I have an obligation to speak out against this. And I'm not the only one. The overwhelming majority of Jewish leadership and Catholic leadership and Christian leaders...

"Nine experts in the field of Catholic-Jewish relations... have said that this film is horrible."

**New York Times, January 23, 2004; Rabbi Marvin Hier:**

"Rabbi Hier said he was 'horrified' by the movie, which he said depicted all Jews, except those who were Jesus' followers, as villainous, with dark beards and eyes, 'like Rasputin.'"

**Jewish Journal of Greater Los Angeles, August 24, 2003; Rabbi Marvin Hier:**

"It's a headache we don't need. ...

"Now since the Romans are not here anymore, if you're upset with how Jesus died, there's only one people left to blame—and that's the Jews."

**CNN, "CNN Live Sunday," August 10, 2003; Rabbi Marvin Hier:**

"Jews have a right to be concerned. We're the ones that paid the bill in the last 20 centuries for the false charge of

deicide causing millions of deaths.”

**Forward, August 8, 2003, Letter by Harold Brackman, Consultant:**

“It is Christians who bear the responsibility, after 2,000 years of religious-inspired anti-Semitism, to inhibit rather than inflame the excesses of their own haters. When filmmakers with a Christological agenda fail to accept this responsibility, the blood that may result is indeed on their hands.”

**Newsday (NY), July 22, 2003; Rabbi Marvin Hier:**

“This is a story for which millions of people throughout history paid with their lives. They were burned at the stake, killed in pogroms and the Inquisition, and it was also these ideas that served as the foundation of the Holocaust.”

**CNN, “Live From the Headlines,” June 30, 2003; Rabbi Marvin Hier:**

“What I am saying is that four Catholic scholars representing the Catholic bishops, joined five Jewish scholars, unanimously felt there was a great deal of anti-Semitism in the script.”

**Los Angeles Times, June 22, 2003; “Mel’s Passion; Gibson’s making a film on Jesus worries some Jews,” by Rabbi Marvin Hier and Harold Brackman:**

“Any film about such a sensitive subject would set off alarm bells. But a film by Gibson is particularly alarming. ...

“At this tinderbox moment in our new century, we need to be especially careful about a movie that has the potential to further ignite ancient hatreds. “

**MSNBC, Scarborough Country, June 11, 2003; Rabbi Marvin Hier:**

Joe Scarborough, host: “Rabbi, if you read the four gospels –

what do the four gospels in the New Testament say about the crucifixion of Jesus?"

Rabbi Marvin Hier: "Well, first, let me go right to the point. That's a lot of nonsense. Let me say..."

Scarborough: "What's a lot of nonsense?"

Heir: "That the Jews—first of all, crucifixion is illegal according to Jewish law. According to (UNINTELLIGIBLE) law..."

Scarborough: "What's a lot of nonsense, though?"

Heir: "To blame the—Christ was crucified. Crucifixion is not a Jewish method of punishment. Secondly, the event occurred on Passover night. If you could get one Rabbi to leave his Seder to participate in a judgment on Passover night, it would be like getting the Supreme Court to convene in the United States for a night trial. It is simply impossible."

### **Rabbinical Alliance of America**

**Jerusalem Post, September 12, 2003; Letter by Rabbi Abraham B. Hecht and Rabbi Joshua S. Hecht, Rabbinical Alliance of America:**

"The Rabbinical Alliance of America, representing the united voice of 500 Orthodox rabbis serving Jewish communities throughout North America, strongly opposes The Passion, produced by actor and director Mel Gibson.

"The message of this movie—as widely reported by the Simon Wiesenthal Center in Los Angeles and by others who have reviewed the film—is highly problematic for its historical inaccuracy and its message of intolerance and overt anti-Semitic overtones."

### **Commentary**

### **Columnists**

**Commonweal, May 7, 2004; "Anti-Semitism in 'The Passion,'" by Rabbi Irving Greenberg, president, Jewish Life Network/Steinhardt Foundation:**

"The Gospels themselves, literally understood, generate hatred (and worse) vis-à-vis Jews, living and dead. ...

"Read literally, they are primary sources of hatred and anti-Semitism. In order to atone for past sins and to prevent future evil acts based on Gospel writings, the bishops and the leaders of other churches must confront the New Testament (via modern scholarship or theological critique) or stand convicted of continuing the evils of the past."

**Jewish Week, April 16, 2004; "Mel's Secret: Jew-Baiting Good For Sales," by Rabbi Shmuley Boteach:**

"[T]he real reason Mel Gibson succeeded with "The Passion" was that he successfully baited the Jews, and Jew-baiting is big business. ...

"But Gibson decided that his principal marketing tool was going to be provoking the Jewish community. From his father's public comments about how the Holocaust never happened, to the film's substantial deviation from the New Testament script in an all-out effort to implicate the Jews and exonerate the Romans in the death of Jesus, Gibson stuck the pins into the Jewish watchdogs as deeply as possible. When they barked it was music to his ears. ...

"So it turns out that Mel Gibson may not be an anti-Semite after all. He's just a businessman. Not necessarily very spiritual – if he were, then he would have announced from the outset that all profits from the movie would go to Jesus – but rather just an average guy who wanted to see a good return on his buck."

**Los Angeles Times, April 10, 2004; "'Passion' changes hearts, minds," by Tim Rutten:**

"Gibson's passion narrative is a pastiche of scriptural literalism, the mystical visions of an anti-Semitic 19th century Bavarian nun and various obsessions that preoccupy the so-called traditionalist, pseudo-Catholic fringe.

"So, profits apart, the real question about 'The Passion of the Christ' is: Were those anxieties justified? Has Gibson's film contributed to a climate in which anti-Semitism can flourish?

"We now have at least a provisional answer, and it is yes. ...

"When those who reckon by standards other than profit and loss come to judge the success or failure of Gibson's film, they might hold in mind another admonition from the Christian scriptures:

"'By their fruits shall you know them.'"

**The Nation, March 29, 2004; "The Protocols of Mel Gibson," by Katha Pollitt:**

"The Bible's brief mention of Jesus's flogging... becomes a ten-minute homoerotic sadistic extravaganza that no human being could have survived, as if the point of the Passion was to show how tough Christ was."

**The New Republic, March 22, 2004; "Gibson's Offering," by Stanley Kauffmann:**

"Is 'The Passion' anti-Semitic? Certainly it is, because the Gospels themselves are anti-Semitic—in the sense of fixing Jewish responsibility for the Crucifixion."

**Los Angeles Times, March 20, 2004; "Folk piety links politics, 'Code' and 'Passion,'" by Tim Rutten:**

"Mel Gibson's version of Jesus' arrest and execution recapitulates virtually every crude anti-Semitic stereotype that has ever disfigured Christians memory."

**Saint Paul Pioneer Press, March 20, 2004; “‘Pasion’ movie is no panacea for Christians,” by the Rev. Tom Ehrich (Episcopal):**

“I found it sad that Gibson couldn’t allow his film to make its own way, but had to dangle the bait of anti-Semitism. ... I found it sad that Christian conservatives could be so easily lured into promoting a film... as if they needed to float a sinking ship by shilling for the Middle Ages redux. ...

“But today’s controversy reveals two worrisome undercurrents, which will outlive Gibson’s dash to the bank.

“One is that Christians are spoiling for a fight. This fight, that fight, any fight. Bring it on. If we aren’t fighting, we aren’t living.”

**The Jewish Week, March 19, 2004; “Gibson’s ‘Midrash,’” by Joshua Hammerman:**

“The innocent Christian observer will focus far more on the familiar Sunday school touchstones.... But they will miss the subtle deviations from the text and incorporate some of these mythic events into their imagination, and that is where the danger lies. ...

“The filmmaker’s freedom of speech should never be questioned. But Mel Gibson at best was irresponsible to add a new element of bigotry to the most dangerous story ever told. To revive the Passion that launched a thousand pogroms is almost the equivalent of shouting ‘Midrash’ in a crowded theater. We should be increasingly wary of this combustible amalgamation of visual image and inflated commentary.”

**Duluth News Tribune, March 17, 2004; “Distortions worsen pain of Gibson’s ‘Passion,’” by Edward Kale:**

“‘The Passion of the Christ,’ however, should never have been produced. It is based on biblical documents which are neither

historical nor factual yet are treated as such. Much of it is nonbiblical. ... What did Jesus really say? Let's be honest. We don't know any more than Matthew did. The movie, to use British English, is 'bloody literal and bloody awful.'"

**America, March 15, 2004; "Mel O'Drama," by the Rev. Richard Blake, S.J., Boston College:**

"Yes, Roman execution was a brutal, bloody business, but presenting it in such graphic detail passes dangerously close to a pornography of violence. Clinical detail cheapens both eroticism and suffering. ...

"[The film has a] morbid fascination with pain..."

**Bergen Record (NJ), March 14, 2004; "The Gospel of Mel Gibson," by Mike Kelly:**

"This is precisely the sort of narrow storytelling that led to centuries of anti-Semitic acts, culminating in the murder of 6 million Jews during World War II. Why doesn't Gibson see this? ... What's truly scary is that audiences are flocking to see this."

**Idaho Statesman, March 13, 2004; "Bush and Gibson employ the politics of hatred," by Dan Fink:**

"How troubling... to find that bigotry wrapped in the mantle of piety is alive and well in our own nation. America—a land founded by people fleeing religious intolerance—is currently besieged by leaders promoting hatred in the name of faith. Consider the two most prominent recent offenders: George W. Bush and Mel Gibson. ...

"As for Mel Gibson, this veteran of numerous violent movies has now made a mint on his own sadistic film, promoting it through shameless Jew-baiting. ...In 'The Passion of the Christ,' Gibson not only revokes Pope John's cry for forgiveness, he revivifies the ancient curse and revels in its

bloodlust. Gibson would have us view the death of Jesus... with no reference to the terrible history of pogroms and murders inspired by generations of passion plays. This is, at best, inexcusably ignorant, and, at worst, simply anti-Semitic. ...

"Whatever its art, this film is malevolent. ...

"Alas, the consequences of our leaders' courting bigotry in the name of sanctity are painfully obvious to those of us who suffer their wrath. ... The real tragedy is that we... will have the terrible task of informing them [our children] that our nation's president and one of its biggest film stars on the side of the bigots who are bullying them."

**The New Republic, March 8, 2004; "The Worship of Blood," by Leon Wieseltier:**

"It is a repulsive masochistic fantasy, a sacred snuff film, and it leaves you with the feeling that the man who made it hates life. ... It will be objected that I see only pious pornography in The Passion of the Christ because I am not a believer in the Christ. ...

"[I]s the sanctification of murder really what this country needs now? ...

But there is a religion toward which Gibson's movie is even more unfair than it is to its own. In its representation of its Jewish characters, The Passion of the Christ is without any doubt an anti-Semitic movie, and anybody who says otherwise knows nothing, or chooses to know nothing, about the visual history of anti-Semitism, in art and in film. What is so shocking about Gibson's Jews is how unreconstructed they are in their stereotypical appearances and actions. These are not merely anti-Semitic images; these are classically anti-Semitic images. In this regard, Gibson is most certainly a traditionalist. ...

"But the loathing of Jews in Mel Gibson's film is really not

its worst degradation. ... Its loathing of Jews is subsumed in its loathing of spirituality, in its loathing of existence. If there is a kingdom of heaven, The Passion of the Christ is shutting it in men's faces."

**New York Observer, March 8, 2004; "Passion of Mel is Mean, Gnarled, Next to the Sacred," by Ron Rosenbaum:**

"But enough about love. Let's talk about hatred. Not the incitement to hatred in The Passion of the Christ, although by this time any informed person, Christian or Jewish, who doesn't see it there is engaging in what Gabriel Schoenfeld calls 'anti-Semitism denial' (in his important new book *The Return of Anti-Semitism*). Let's not even talk about the way Mel Gibson distorted not just history but the Gospels themselves to intensify the vilification of Jews. As Columbia scholar James Shapiro demonstrates in *Oberammergau: The Troubling Story of the World's Most Famous Passion Play* ... efforts can be made to tone down the anti-Semitic incitement in the Passion narrative. Mel Gibson tones them up, as many have observed. ...

"You could argue that Mel Gibson is not intentionally anti-Semitic. It's possible that he's just too stupid to know the effect of what he's done, too ignorant of the historical effect of Passion plays. But his father is intent personified—intent that seems to have been transmitted to a gullible son who wants to win his father's love. ...

"Over the centuries, thousands of Jews have been murdered in pogroms that followed the anti-Jewish incitement of Passion play productions. It's unlikely that anything like that will happen in America as a result of the film, but there are other areas of the world where it's just as likely that something will. Its vicious incitement will be burned into the hearts of more people than have seen a Passion play in all of history up until now.

"If the Jews in Hollywood really 'controlled' everything, they would be making a movie about a Jew who was whipped and scourged by a mob who had been incited to murder by a Passion play. There's plenty of precedent, and it might provide a useful corrective.

"But I don't foresee that happening. As the Pope either said or didn't say: 'It is as it was.' Until it gets worse."

**Washington Post, March 8, 2004; "Walking a Long Mile in Judas's Sandals," by Tom Shales:**

"Unlike Mel Gibson's notorious 'The Passion of the Christ,' ABC's movie ["Judas"] seems happily lacking in anti-Semitic aspersions. Writer Tom Fontana... has Pontius Pilate's wife tell her husband, as the assassination of Jesus is plotted on Palm Sunday: 'Fix it so the Jews themselves are held responsible.'

"It might have been better still if the conversation had continued with Pilate scoffing, 'Who'd believe that?' and his wife replying, 'You can always find a few bigots and idiots who'll believe anything.' Regardless, the Big Lie was born, and two millennia later, Gibson would find a way to recycle it and gross more than \$200 million in the process. Surely his parking space in Hell has already been reserved."

**New York Times, March 7, 2004; "Mel Gibson Forgives Us For His Sins," by Frank Rich:**

"With its laborious build-up to its orgasmic spurtings of blood and other bodily fluids, Mr. Gibson's film is constructed like nothing so much as a porn movie, replete with slo-mo climaxes and pounding music for the money shots. Of all the 'Passion' critics, no one has nailed its artistic vision more precisely than Christopher Hitchens, who on 'Hardball' called it a homoerotic 'exercise in lurid sadomasochism' for those who 'like seeing handsome young men stripped and flayed alive over a long period of time.' ...

“Speaking as someone who has never experienced serious bigotry, I must confess that, whatever happens abroad, the fracas over ‘The Passion’ has made me feel less secure as a Jew in America than ever before. ...

“What concerns me much more are those with leadership positions in the secular world—including those in the media—who have given Mr. Gibson, ‘The Passion’ and its most incendiary hucksters a free pass for behavior that is unambiguously contrived to vilify Jews ...

“Of late, however, the star has ratcheted up the volume of his complaints, floating insinuations out of the “Protocols of the Elders of Zion.” Speaking of his critics to Diane Sawyer of ABC, Mr. Gibson said: “It’s only logical to assume that conspiracies are everywhere, because that’s what people do. They conspire. If you can’t get the message, get the man.” So who is in this dark, fearful conspiracy? The only conspirator mentioned by name in that interview was me. But Ms. Sawyer never identified me as Jewish, thereby sanitizing Mr. Gibson’s rant of its truculent meaning. (She did show a picture of me, though, perhaps assuming that my nose might give me away.)”

**St. Petersburg Times (FL), March 7, 2004; “Is the Gospel Anti-Semitic?” by Roy Peter Clark, senior scholar, Poynter Institute:**

“The tragedy lies in how we Christians have used the story of Jesus to hurt the Jews. This injustice will be visited upon our Jewish brothers and sisters with each viewing of ‘The Passion of the Christ,’ not because the film is a hyperviolent distortion of the Gospels, but because it is a mostly accurate meditation on the central story of Christianity.

“Let me state my thesis more boldly. Every time we Christians tell the story of our salvation, we hurt the Jews. ...

“What would Jesus do if he sat through a Catholic Mass around Easter time and heard the communal reading of the Passion and

listened as the congregation recited that the blood of Jesus is upon the heads of the Jews and their children?

“After he dried his tears, I think he would stand, raise his hand, and in the ensuing silence, declare to the congregation his pride in his Jewishness, his attachment to the Torah, and his sorrow that the story of his death had been turned so grotesquely against his own people.”

**New York Times, March 5, 2004; capsule review by A.O. Scott:**

“His [Gibson’s] stated goal was realism, but the emphatic musical, visual and aural effects – the first nail is driven into Jesus’ palms with a sickening thwack that must have required hours of digital tweaking—make the film a melodramatic exercise in high-minded sadomasochism.”

**USA Today, March 5, 2004; “‘Passion’ so bloody it’s sadomasochism,” by Al Neuharth:**

“This is a skillfully planned and presented but wasted exercise in sadomasochism.”

**Forward (NY), March 4, 2004; “Mel Gibson’s Cross of Vengeance,” by Daniel Jonah Goldhagen:**

“I have often thought but kept to myself what a gruesome thing they are, traditional crucifixes, each one with the likeness of a mangled, agonized body affixed cruelly to it. I sometimes wondered, even as a child, what kind of a religion would want children to look at an image of a suffering, dying or dead man, with nails piercing his hands. What is its effect upon them? Why would the spiritual leaders of any religion want their flock to gaze regularly at such horror, to gaze lovingly at such horror, to feel exalted at the image of such horror?

“Instinctively I have always been uncomfortable around crucifixes, even though I grew up in the Boston area, historically the most privileged kind of environment for a Jew

in a Christian world, one that was free of intense or intensely expressed antipathies towards Jews. I never really understood exactly why I felt such discomfort with the crucifix, and since it was not much of a presence in my life, I never asked myself. Perhaps it was because of my historical knowledge, acquired sadly even as a child, of the harm that the followers of the crucifix had inflicted on those who refused to embrace it. But perhaps not. It might have been only or mainly a visceral reaction of a sensitive child. After all, I had become a vegetarian at the age of 10 because I found the sight of meat revolting. ...

“Because of Mel Gibson, to speak openly about the gruesome crucifix imagery seems now not only permissible but morally unavoidable. Gibson’s film takes the fetishizing of horror and death that exists within Christianity to some sort of sickly logical conclusion. Visually, iconographically and symbolically, Gibson’s ‘Passion’ is a sadomasochistic, orgiastic display that demonizes Jews as it degrades those who revel in viewing the horror. ... Its orgy of unsurpassed and virtually unremitting sadism restores this part of the Jesus story deemphasized by the Catholic Church since the Vatican II reforms to center stage, to haunt all those who would follow Jesus with indelible, iconic images of cruelty. Gibson has thus unwittingly exposed the misguidedness of this cult of death. To the extent that such a vision of God dominates and obscures Jesus’ Christian ministry of life, love and good works (as it does almost totally in the film), Gibson has also unveiled its meanness.”

**Kansas City Star, March 4, 2004; “Ghoulish ‘Passion’ secular, not sacred,” by Vern Barnett:**

“Mel Gibson’s ‘The Passion of the Christ’ is not just a bad movie; it is hurtful. ... Early concerns that the film might be anti-Semitic...now seem justified.

“One wonders if he [Gibson] is explaining the torture,

depravity and sadomasochist preoccupations of his other movies by commandeering a sacred subject. ... What I ask is: Why doesn't God forgive humanity without this barbaric sacrifice?

"The popularity of this irresponsible movie marks how dangerous the secular religious spectacle has become."

**Washington Post, March 4, 2004; "Scared Boring: Hollywood's Timid Streak," by Tina Brown:**

"It's not the supposed anti-Semitism of the movie they're ["Hollywood denizens"] worried about now—though you don't have to be Jewish to wonder about a picture in which the only Jewish authority figures are a bunch of mean, hook-nosed temple priests with long beards and an effeminate, overweight King Herod wearing too much eyeliner and lounging around with a pet leopard, while the gentile authority figure is a conscience-stricken Roman with a fashionable Tom Ford stubble and a wife who talks like the chairman of the local chapter of Amnesty International."

**Los Angeles Times, March 2, 2004; "A Passion for Hatred That Mocks Christ's Message," by Robert Scheer:**

"I just saw Gibson's "The Passion of the Christ" and it is a blood libel against the Jewish people that should have every prominent Christian minister and priest speaking out in opposition. ...

"It requires a deeply felt anti-Semitism on Gibson's part to depict the community that nurtured Jesus as nothing more than a venal mob that forced an eminently reasonable and kind Roman overlord to crucify Jesus. Even the beastly lower-level Roman legionnaires who whip Jesus for most of the movie's duration are engaged in this orgy of sadism not to please Caesar but rather to mollify the rabbis. ...

"[T]he sadomasochistic preoccupation of the film could not obscure the fact that Christ never endorsed vengeance or

departed from his message of universal love. Ultimately, however, this is just an exploitation flick that serves up the body of Christ as an object of continuous sick torture while ignoring his life and thoughts.

"Despite our pretensions of modernity and humanitarianism, the world is currently plagued by Christian, Jewish, Islamic and Hindu fundamentalists who seem more passionate about employing their holy books as weapons than as instruments of peace.

"Sadly, that is the essence of Gibson's movie."

**Philadelphia Daily News, March 2, 2004; "Fact... or cruci-fiction'?" by Stephan Rosenfeld:**

"Most troubling to me is 'The Passion's' historically inaccurate portrayal of bloodthirsty Jews as being responsible for the Crucifixion. ...His [Gibson's] is a work of cruci-fiction" and should be seen in that context. ...

"I remember thinking during one of the Jesus-thrashing scenes that the portrayal bordered on the pornographic—grossly mechanical to a point where the audience was losing feeling along with Jesus."

**Washington Post, March 2, 2004; "Faith and Violence" by Richard Cohen:**

"I thought the movie was... anti-Semitic, maybe not purposely so but in the way portions of the New Testament are—an assignment of blame that culminated in the Holocaust. But I wrote none of that, actually nothing at all, because there was something else about the movie that disturbed me, and it took days to figure it out. It is fascistic.

"I don't know if I use the word right—probably I don't. But I want to use it because I recently read Richard J. Evans's brilliant 'The Coming of the Third Reich,' in which it becomes clear, if it wasn't before, how violence was so much a part of

fascism. It was not merely that Hitler and, to a lesser extent, Mussolini used force to get their way but also that violence, almost for the sake of it, became part of the ethic—what Evans calls ‘the cult of violence.’ After awhile, Germans became inured. That, both precisely and surprisingly, is how I felt watching Gibson’s disturbingly nondisturbing movie. I was bored stiff.

“This is what I mean by a fascistic sensibility. The violence was the message. It overwhelmed the message of Christ... What’s more, the cause of the violence—its origins—was not the Romans, who were actually in charge, but stereotypical Jews who, in their clever ways, manipulated even Pontius Pilate, about the only complex figure in the entire movie. Gibson says he is no anti-Semite. Maybe. But if he could breathe humanity into the autocratic Pilate, then why not something similar for the downtrodden Jews?”

**Beliefnet.com, March 1, 2004; “Jesus at Midnight,” by Rabbi Shmuley Boteach:**

“I personally found the film to be a gross defamation—not just of the Jews who were portrayed as having demonically demanded the death of Christ—but especially of Christianity which is portrayed as a religion of blood, gore, and death, rather than of blessing, love, and life.”

**Newsweek, March 1, 2004; “So What’s the Good News?” by David Ansen:**

“It’s the sadism, not the alleged anti-Semitism, that is most striking. ... I found myself recoiling from the movie, wanting to keep it at arm’s length—much the same feeling I had watching Gaspar Noe’s notorious ‘Irreversible,’ with its nearly pornographic real-time depiction of a rape.”

**New York Times, March 1, 2004; “Not Peace, but a Sword,” by William Safire:**

"Mel Gibson's movie... is the bloodiest, most brutal example of sustained sadism ever presented on the screen. ...

"The villains at whom the audience's outrage is directed are the actors playing bloodthirsty rabbis and their rabid Jewish followers. This is the essence of the medieval 'Passion Play,' preserved in pre-Hitler Germany at Oberammergau, a source of the hatred of all Jews as 'Christ Killers.'

"At a moment when a wave of anti-Semitic violence is sweeping Europe and the Middle East, is religion well served by updating the Jew-baiting passion plays of Oberammergau on DVD? Is art served by presenting the ancient divisiveness in blood-streaming media to the widest audiences in the history of drama? ...

"Gibson's medieval version of the suffering of Jesus, reveling in savagery to provoke outrage and cast blame, fails Christian and Jew today."

**Time, March 1, 2004; "Why It's So Bloody," by David Van Biema:**

"[T]he film's true shock lies in Gibson's vision of what is most important in the Jesus story, in the relentless, near pornographic feast of flayed flesh."

**San Antonio Express-News, February 29, 2004; "Truth seekers descend on city," by Joe Holley:**

"It wasn't only Gibson's overwhelmingly negative depiction of Jews (the movie slides by the fact that Jesus and his followers also were Jews); it also was Gibson's searing and agonizingly long depiction of sadistic violence. I understand what Gibson's trying to do, but, in effect, he panders to the same dark emotions that draw Spaniards to bullfights, that drew Romans to Colosseum gladiatorial bouts.

"For reasons too involved to explore here, I would argue that his Hollywood sadomasochistic torturefest dangerously distorts

the Christian message.”

**Washington Post, February 29, 2004; “So Much Irony in this Passion,” by Paul Richard:**

“There is a lot of ‘anti’ in Gibson’s film, and not only anti-Semitism. The film is anti the secular, and anti the squeamish. And the many clean-cross Protestants who see it ought to be reminded that the style of its images once was aimed at Christians pretty much like them.”

**Daily News (NY), February 29, 2004; “Week of Real Hatred,” by Jami Bernard:**

“My main objection to ‘The Passion’ is that Gibson has used the tools at his disposal to disguise sadism as piety.”

**San Antonio Express-News, February 28, 2004; “‘Passion’ rouses emotions – in all the wrong ways,” by the Rev. Michael Coffey, associate pastor, Christ Lutheran Church, San Antonio:**

“For many centuries in Europe, the Passion play was presented in a specifically anti-Jewish way that provoked real violence and oppression against Jews. ...

“It is this history of blaming Jews for Jesus’ death that must be considered when evaluating public presentations of the Passion story. It is a blame that incites hatred and violence, and it is implicit in the development of Nazi propaganda against Jews. To interpret “The Passion of the Christ” without taking account of this troubling history is irresponsible. ...

“It is a pornographic presentation of violence.”

**Jewish Week (NY), February 27, 2004; “Mel Gibson’s Blood-Soaked Blame Game,” by George Robinson:**

“The theology... despite Gibson’s protestations to the contrary and his apparent absolution by some Jewish leaders, is an appalling blend of medieval blood libel and Father Coughlin. ...

"Whatever that [Gibson's] agenda may be, this much is definitely clear: Among the major motion-pictures recounting the Christ story, this is the only one that places almost all the blame for the death of Jesus on the Jews."

**New York Sun, February 27, 2004; "Pornographic Religion," by Andrew Sullivan:**

"In a word, it is pornography.

"By pornography, I mean the reduction of all human thought and feeling and personality to mere flesh. The centerpiece of the movie is an absolutely disgusting piece of sadism that has no real basis in any of the Gospels. ... That same psychotic sadism permeates the entire enterprise. ...

"I wouldn't say that this movie is motivated by anti-Semitism. It's motivated by psychotic sadomasochism. But Mr. Gibson does nothing to mitigate the dangerous anti-Semitic elements of the story and goes some way toward exaggerating and highlighting them.

To my mind, that is also unforgivable. Anti-Semitism is the original sin of Christianity. Far from expiating it, this movie clearly enjoys taunting those Catholics, as well as Jews, who are determined to confront that legacy."

**Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, February 27, 2004; "Mel Gibson's Unredeeming Gospel of Pain," by Tony Norman:**

"As it stands, "The Passion of the Christ" is a swirling miasma of torture devoid of serious character development or redemptive purpose. The film's appeal to pain fetishists will be obvious, but most viewers will be justified in assuming that sado-masochism is at the heart of the gospel according to Mel.

"The movie has many good points, but they're offset by oppressive meditations on sadism. Faith rooted in blood and

guilt eventually conjures the god it deserves.”

**Daily News (NY), February 25, 2004; “The Passion of the Christ,” by Jami Bernard:**

“No child should see this movie. Even adults are at risk. Mel Gibson’s ‘The Passion of the Christ’ is the most virulently anti-Semitic movie made since the German propaganda films of World War II.

“The violence is grotesque, savage, and often fetishized in slo-mo. ...

“The movie is a compendium of tortures that would horrify the regulars at an S&M club. ...

“Religious intolerance has been used as an excuse for some of history’s worst atrocities. ‘The Passion of the Christ’ is a brutal, nasty film that demonizes Jews at an unfortunate time in history.”

**Detroit Free Press, February 25, 2004; “Graphic film stirs tears for Jesus, fears for Jews,” by David Crumm:**

“In portraying Jesus’ final hours, Gibson, a Catholic who disputes changes in his church since the 1960s, tramples on decades of interfaith relationships built by Catholic and Jewish leaders in the United States. ...

“This isn’t a movie in any traditional sense. It’s an invitation to post-traumatic stress and an attempt to evangelize moviegoers by stamping Jesus’ suffering face into our consciousness.”

**Los Angeles Times, February 25, 2004; “‘Passion’ nurtures seeds of hatred,” Walter Reich, George Washington University: “‘Passion’ nurtures seeds of hatred,” Walter Reich, George Washington University:**

“What matters is whether the film will incite a significant

number of people to hate Jews. And that, very effectively, it will do.

“How could it not? Many of its viewers will be believing Christians who, at excruciating length, in slow motion and repeatedly, will watch their Messiah – the gentle and forgiving Lord of love and peace – lashed, pierced, nailed to the cross. And those viewers will see the Jews as the people centrally responsible for that divine, ultimate and excruciating torment. ...

“Gibson says he wants the movie to lead people to a place of deeper faith. But for many it will lead to an inflamed, convulsed and abiding anger about Christ’s torments, aimed at the perfidious, treacherous, scheming, sadistic and evil Jews.

“If such anger at Jews had no history of murderous consequences, the film and its effects wouldn’t be of such concern. But it’s precisely that kind of anti-Semitic anger, provoked over the centuries by sermons and **Passion** plays, that has resulted in expulsions, inquisitions and pogroms. And it’s that kind of anger that became the seedbed in which the anti-Semitism that flourished in the last century, and the Holocaust it produced, took root. ...

“And at a time when for other reasons it [anti-Semitism] has been growing around the world, Gibson’s film—powerful as only film can be—could dangerously accelerate that growth, inciting passions to a degree and on a scale that only a perverted presentation of the Passion can incite.”

**Philadelphia Daily News, February 25, 2004; “‘Passion’ nurtures seeds of hatred,” Walter Reich, George Washington University: “Film stirs dismay in modern-day scribe,” Ron Goldwyn:**

“No one will storm from the metroplexes and launch a pogrom. But what will be the intangible effect on those who believe in Jesus’ divinity toward those who do not?”

**Chicago Tribune, February 23, 2004; “Mel Gibson makes a war movie,” by Susan Thistlethwaite, president, Chicago Theological Seminary:**

“The controversy that has preceded this film’s official opening has been over the selective portrayal of the Jewish synagogue leaders as ‘responsible’ for the death of Jesus. This is an interpretation as well, and a dangerous one in the current world climate of rising religious hatreds. ...

“The Roman soldiers are portrayed as brutal, but the slant of the film is to make the Jews culpable. This is an interpretive choice and a historically ignorant one. ...

“This film is not only dangerous for Jews; it is dangerous for Christians in today’s warring world to think Jesus is an action hero. ...

“It is also a sado-masochistic portrayal of the death of Jesus. ...

“The message is that the violence done to Jesus justifies violent retaliation.”

**Fort Worth Star-Telegram (TX), February 23, 2004; “Mel Gibson may not be anti-Semitic, but he’s not a very moral man,” by Christopher Kelly:**

“Wearing a cloak of piety, Mel Gibson—who has been quoted as saying the Holy Spirit ‘was working through me on this film’—has fanned the flames of anti-Semitism into a marketing bonfire. ... And he’s done it by preying on Jewish people’s very legitimate fears that the film will reignite old prejudices that Jews were responsible for the death of Christ. ...

“Is ‘The Passion of the Christ’ anti-Semitic? That’s an argument that will likely carry on for decades. But this much cannot be disputed: Gibson’s actions thus far have been rooted in utter disdain for Jews. ... He turned the question of just

how anti-Semitic the movie will be into a parlor game.

"Perhaps ... being honest and forthright simply isn't Gibson's way. This is a man who has spent a career taking the low road, while holding the Bible out in front of him—a modern-day Elmer Gantry recast as a \$20-million-a-movie superstar. He tells people how to live and then does a pretty lousy job of setting his own example. ...

"Then there's Mel Gibson the chauvinist, the man who has maintained that men and women are not equal. ... Then there is his unapologetic, unceasing homophobia. ...

"It's a critic's job to separate the art from the artist—to afford the artist at least that much respect; to judge a finished work solely on its own terms. Gibson has all but forfeited that privilege. You can't invoke the Holy Spirit, you can't hold your film up as the purest and most honest express of Jesus Christ's story—and then not back it up with decent words, generous actions. Even if 'The Passion of the Christ' turns out to be the greatest rendering ever of the greatest story ever told, it will still mark a dark day for anyone who values humanity."

**Orlando Sentinel, February 22, 2004; "The Sin of 'Passion,'" by John Dominic Crossan:**

"As a former priest who has written extensively about the early days of Christianity, I found this intolerantly violent movie portrays God in a way at odds with the views of most Christians. ...

"But this film's consistently visual violence raised for me not a problem of squeamishness but a question of conscience: When, if the action is sadistic, does its sustained enactment and viewing of Jesus' death become pornographic? ...

"All of this is not to say that the concern of both Jewish and Christian critics with the way The Passion of The Christ

portrays the Jews' role in Jesus death should be ignored.

"There are major problems here as well, especially for those not aware of the history of the period. ...

"The God of this film is not a God of merciful compassion and loving forgiveness but a God of displaced punishment and vicarious retribution.

"If that were the character of God, this film would be the best argument ever developed for atheism. You would fear or dread, but why would you love or worship such a God?"

**Orlando Sentinel, February 22, 2004; "Gibson's 'Passion' is not the only truth," by Myriam Marquez:**

"Frankly, as a Roman Catholic (and not a very good one), I find the controversy about this film a subplot to a more sinister aspect of the culture wars that consume us today. Many Christians aren't being honest.

"The controversy isn't so much about who killed Jesus. It's really about who's perceived to run Hollywood, the media and other powerful American institutions. The Nazis pointed to the Jews as the "foreigners" who controlled Germany's economy. Today, a segment of American society blames secular Jews like Disney's Michael Eisner for holding powerful positions in Hollywood and the New York-dominated media, and forcing immoral popular culture on the hinterlands."

**Dallas Morning News, February 21, 2004; "Why I won't see 'Passion,'" by Zsuzsanna Ozsvath:**

"Sometimes, a tradition is so deeply ingrained in our culture, as is anti-Semitism, that we recognize its psychological, religious and societal manifestations from the structure in which it appears. We know its workings, and we know its consequences.

"Such is the case of the Passion plays and their most recent

expression, Mel Gibson's movie, The Passion of the Christ. ...

"Performed during Passion Week, the plays often were followed by processions of the villagers gathering for the Easter mass, preparing and carrying out pogroms against the Jews. In that way, thousands of Jews were hunted down and massacred over the centuries. ...

"And while I don't think the showing of Mr. Gibson's Passion play will be followed by pogroms here, I unfortunately can foresee its impact on audiences not only in Egypt, France and England but also in Hungary and Poland, where the flames of anti-Semitism already have consumed the lives of millions of Jews."

**Philadelphia Daily News, February 12, 2004; "Mel Gibson's Mortal Sin?" by Michael Smerconish:**

"Is Mel Gibson a Holocaust denier?

"I think that's a fair question given a just-released excerpt from an interview with Gibson in an upcoming issue of Reader's Digest. ...

"[On Gibson's comments in Reader's Digest] Wait a minute. At first blush that may sound OK. But go back and read it again. On closer inspection, it's unacceptable if that is as far as it goes. It just might be a more cleverly disguised version of what his dad told the Times magazine. ...

"I'm anxious to see the movie, and have, until recently, been sympathetic to Mel Gibson in the context of concerns raised by people who largely have not seen the film and fear it is nothing more than a modern Passion Play. Now, I am not so sure my sympathy was warranted.

"I will see it – and, in the back of my mind, I'll be wondering, like father like son?"

**Newsday, February 11, 2004; "Despite Mel Gibson, the Gospels**

**Aren't Gospel," by Paul Ginnetty, director, Institute for the Study of Religion and Community Life, St. Joseph's College, NY:**

"Uncritical reading of John had for centuries fanned anti-Semitism among the naïve and the willfully ignorant. Despite cuts of some potentially offensive material, there remains concern that Gibson's unsophisticated equating of text with accurate history could resuscitate such error. Were that to happen, recourse by Gibson to a glib defense of The-Bible-Made-Me-Do-It will be less than convincing.

"His blithe portrayal of biblical texts as uncomplicated history suggests an ideologically driven attempt to define any problematic elements of the film as being beyond criticism, cloaked in biblical inerrancy, Spirit-dictated history and his own piety."

**Los Angeles Times, February 4, 2004; "Critics debate 'The Passion,' Gibson evades the debate," by Tim Rutten:**

"Take, for example, the straightforward way in which those concerned with Mel Gibson's soon-to-be-released movie, 'The Passion of the Christ,' continue to express their reservations and apprehensions, as compared with the filmmaker's continued evasions concerning nearly every significant issue raised by the controversy."

**The State (SC), November 20, 2003; "Pass on Gibson's Passion," by Rabbi Marc Howard Wilson:**

"...The wacky perspective of a wacko Catholic will certainly not change their [Jewish] minds."

**Village Voice (NY), November 7, 2003; "Mel Gibson's Jesus Christ Pose," by Jessica Winter:**

"It may instigate violence..."

**Palm Beach Post, October 24, 2003; "Gibson's film all about**

**his own agenda,” by Steve Gushee:**

“Sure, Mel Gibson’s film, *The Passion*, is probably anti-Semitic. The less obvious but more dangerous problem is that the movie about the death of Jesus is probably not Christian.

...

“Any version of the Crucifixion that blatantly ignores the teaching of the church is both devious and probably servant to another agenda.

“Gibson says *The Passion* reflects his faith.

“That may well be, but it’s not Christianity.”

**Philadelphia Daily News, September 24, 2003; “Jews Probably Did Do It–But So What?” by Steven Waldman:**

“Christians who don’t understand Jews’ sensitivity to the misuse of *Passion* narratives are a bit dense. On the other hand, some of the comments from Gibson supporters smell rotten.”

**Newsday (NY), September 23, 2003; “The Power and Clash of Symbols,” by Katti Gray:**

“Whether Hollywood will release ‘*The Passion*,’ filmed with another all-white cast and traversing the last 12 hours of Jesus’ stormy life, is the lingering, unanswered \$25 million question of the moment.”

**New York Times, September 21, 2003; “The Greatest Story Ever Sold,” by Frank Rich:**

“Clearly he [Mel Gibson] was looking for a brawl, and he hasn’t let up since. ...

“What makes the unfolding saga of “*The Passion*” hard to ignore is not so much Mr. Gibson’s playacting fisticuffs but the extent to which his combative marketing taps into larger

angers. The "Passion" fracas is happening not in a vacuum but in an increasingly divided America fighting a war that many on both sides see as a religious struggle."

**Entertainment Weekly, September 5, 2003; "Heaven and Mel," by Jeff Jensen and Allison Hope Weiner:**

"History is populated with people who've gone to extremes in the name of Jesus Christ. Some have died for him. Some have killed for him. And some have made \$ 25 million films about his trial and crucifixion in Aramaic, Latin, and Hebrew without even the benefit of subtitles."

**Boston Globe, August 18, 2003; "Gibson's Contentious 'Passion,'" by Cathy Young:**

"But in its own way, the attitude of some champions of 'The Passion' is troubling... The biblical account of Jesus' life and death should not be sacrificed to political correctness. But the cry of 'political correctness' can also become a cover for very real bigotry."

**Salon.com, August 14, 2003; "Mel Gibson vs. 'The Jews,'" by Christopher Orlet:**

"'The Passion' will most likely offer up the familiar puerile, stereotypical view of the evil Jew calling for Jesus' blood and the clueless Pilate begging him to reconsider. It is a view guaranteed to stir anew the passions of the rabid Christian, and one that will send the Jews scurrying back to the dark corners of history."

**Daily News (NY), August 8, 2003; "Mel Must Act to Stem Rise of Anti-Semitism," by Richard Chesnoff:**

"We've come a long way in Christian-Jewish relations. But now Hollywood's Mel Gibson threatens to set it all back—maybe 2,000 years. ...

"Mostly, Gibson, an enormously popular figure, must decide

whether he wants to be responsible for reviving the kind of hate-filled passions that will send other 7-year-olds running home from school, taunted by gangs calling them 'Christ killers.'"

**Los Angeles Times, August 6, 2003; "'Passion' shaping up as Gibson's lethal weapon," by Tim Rutten:**

"And as the growing controversy over Gibson's 'The Passion' spills more widely onto the nation's op-ed pages, into political magazines and even into the halls of Congress, more than rhetorical bruises are likely to be suffered.

"Even in steady hands, the Passion narrative is as combustible as material can be. "

**The New York Times, August 3, 2003; "Mel Gibson's Martyrdom Complex," by Frank Rich:**

"These days American Jews don't have to fret too much about the charge of deicide—or didn't, until Mel Gibson started directing a privately financed movie called 'The Passion,' about Jesus' final 12 hours. ...

"...damage has been done: Jews have already been libeled by Mr. Gibson's politicized rollout of his film. His game from the start has been to foment the old-as-Hollywood canard that the 'entertainment elite' (which just happens to be Jewish) is gunning for his Christian movie. ...

"But the real question here is why Mr. Gibson and his minions would go out of their way to bait Jews and sow religious conflict, especially at this fragile historical moment."

**The Boston Globe, July 22, 2003; "Is Mel Gibson's Film Passion for Jesus Misplaced?," by Alex Beam:**

"Whatever Gibson's intentions, the film will be perceived as anti-Semitic, because the Christian Bible holds that Jesus was a Jewish prophet rejected and betrayed by his own people."

**New York Post, June 19, 2003; "Mel's Cross to Bear," by Eric Feltmann :**

"Gibson's insistence that the film 'conforms to the narratives of Christ's passion and death found in the four Gospels of the New Testament' is hardly reassuring. Because, to be sure, the gospels, for various historical reasons, do paint Jews in the worst light. "

**New York Post, June 13, 2003; "Mel Doesn't Stick to the Scripture in Crime of 'Passion,'" by Andrea Peyser:**

"Dr. Paula Fredriksen of Boston University said: 'Jesus was Jewish. But with this story, it's easy to forget.'

"Gibson has said his film was to tell the true story of Jesus' death.

" There is still time, Mel, to tell the truth."

**The Boston Globe, April 15, 2003; "The True Horror in the Death of Jesus," by James Carroll:**

"He [Gibson] was referring to the graphic violence with which the film renders the crucifixion, but no matter how grotesque the murder of Jesus was, its 'true horror' lies in the way this event became the source of hatred and murder aimed at the Jewish people. ...

"Even a faithful repetition of the Gospel stories of the death of Jesus can do damage exactly because those sacred texts themselves carry the virus of Jew hatred. ...

"The religious anti-Judaism of the Gospels provided soil out of which grew the racial anti-Semitism of the Holocaust. Once Christians know where the falsely anti-Jewish Passion story led, it is criminal for them to repeat it naively—whether from a pulpit or on a movie screen."

**Letters**

**The Record (NJ), March 2, 2004; Letter:**

"One could argue that life's vilest acts of pornography are explicitly depicted acts of graphic violence. ... One could take thousands of biblical passages and convert each into a best-selling pornographic movie.

Mel Gibson has out-martyred himself in the latest Jesus flick. ... I wish he had gutted prints of his 'The Passion of the Christ' movie."

**Newsday (NY), February 29, 2004; Letter:**

"The problem with Mel Gibson's 'The Passion of the Christ' is not the film itself, but the Gospel story on which it is based. ...

"The Gospel writers gave the Jesus story an anti-Jewish slant by describing him as persecuted at every turn by Jewish religious leaders and by putting the blame for his crucifixion on the Jews, not on the Romans who ordered his execution. ...

"Let's hope this film does not set the clock back and unleash a new wave of anti-Semitism. One Holocaust is enough."

**Jewish Week (NY), February 27, 2004; Letter:**

"It's sad that Mel Gibson takes a single version (of many that exist) of the accounting of Christ's last days as the only truth (as if he were there to verify this). Perhaps it is even more important at this time to get out the explanation of James Carroll ("Constantine's Sword") as a way of countering Gibson's account. People might then begin to see that historically blaming Jews for the death of a fellow Jew really doesn't make sense. (Then again, they might also see that the reason for the shift of blame to the Jews will bring about some truths with which they may never be able to cope)."

**Fort Lauderdale Sun-Sentinel, January 29, 2004; Letter:**

"Yes, we know that there are educated people of good faith who will internalize the play's message. Who who will protect us from the ignorant peasants who think that the play offers them license to kill Jews?

"The term..."anti-Jewish violence" in no way conveys the horrible slaughter of pogroms [that would be] brought on by this play."

**New York Post, November 5, 2003; Letter by NY State Assemblyman Dov Hikind:**

"Though spoken in Aramaic and Latin, Gibson's film doesn't need subtitles; it screams 'The Jews killed Christ' in every scene."

**New York Times, October 5, 2003; Letter:**

"Mel Gibson's ability to pervert and invert scriptural teaching while claiming to uphold it leads me to think his next movie will be a stirring account of Pope Pius XII's life."

**Palm Beach Post, October 1, 2003; Letter:**

"Cardinal Hoyos' position goes beyond mere insensitivity. When the Cardinal supports Mr. Gibson, he assures the fact that anti-Semitism will continue to thrive and flourish."

**People, September 22, 2003; Letter:**

"After the murder of 6 million Jews, the Jewish community in the United States and worldwide should be concerned about the message being sent by Mel Gibson's film.... This dangerous revision is an insult to the memory of the Holocaust and the good Christians who have tried to make amends for the ultimate crime of anti-Semitism."

**Newsday (NY), September 18, 2003; Letter:**

"Gibson's 'The Passion' is 'just' a movie in the same way 'The Protocols of the Elders of Zion' is 'just' a book."

**Journal News (NY), September 9, 2003; Letter:**

"The movie 'Passion' will foster intolerance toward individuals who had nothing to do with the death of Christ. ... Mel Gibson reminds me of Jane Fonda's actions during Vietnam: irresponsibility from individuals who either do not care what events result from their actions or are just too stupid to understand."

### **News Stories**

**Washington Times, December 11, 2004; U.S. Catholic-Jewish Consultation Committee:**

"The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) and the U.S. Catholic-Jewish Consultation Committee recently called the film a 'modern version of the notorious medieval Passion Plays which so often over the centuries have triggered riots against the Jews of Europe.'"

**Washington Times, December 11, 2004; John Crossin, Professor, Catholic University of America:**

"Catholics at Catholic University also regarded the movie as an anti-Catholic, anti-papal presentation because the Catholic Church had already interpreted these events..."

**Variety, April 19, 2004; Salomon Korn, Vice President, Central Council of Jews, Germany:**

"The anti-Semites will only have their views on Jews confirmed... [The film is a] sadomasochist orgy of violence [laden with] kitsch..."

**Variety, April 19, 2004; Rabbi John Levi, president of the Australian Union for Progressive Judaism, Australia:**

"I shudder to think of the effect the film will have on the uninitiated. Practically every piece of Jewish history was violated as the story was told."

**Variety, April 19, 2004; Gilbert Lewi, Delegation of Israeli-Argentinian Associations:**

"'You see images and stereotypes that we thought would never exist again after the Nazi era.'

"More worrying, he says is that some Christian groups are giving out free pirate copies of 'The Passion' and screening it in churches as an evangelizing and teaching tool."

**Detroit Free Press, April 12, 2004; Samantha Harrison-Stand, Executive Director, Temple Israel, Bay City, MI:**

"'It's not [a local anti-Semitic preacher] that really frightens me. It's the people who listen to him,' Harrison-Stand, the synagogue's executive director, said last month. 'The people who will go to the movie theater, see 'The Passion of the Christ,' and just crack and go out and do something crazy. That's what I'm afraid of.'"

**USA Today, April 3, 2004; Charlotte Knobloch, Vice President, Central Council of Jews, Germany:**

"[The film's] suggestive power... will give a further push to the current resurgence of anti-Semitism."

**Hollywood Reporter, March 23, 2004; Marin Karmitz, French Federation of Distributors:**

"I refused to program the film in my network of theaters. ... I have always fought against fascism, notably through my exhibition activity. For me, 'Passion' is a film of fascist propaganda. ...

"Lastly, given the representation of the Jews, anti-Semitism is the third element of this fascist ideology....

“Behind this ‘Passion’ ... you can glimpse a whole internationale of religious fundamentalism, a martyrology based on violence, contempt for the body and hatred for the human element.”

**Sun-Sentinel (FL), March 22, 2004; Rabbi Robert Silvers, Congregation B’Nai Israel, Boca Raton, FL:**

“Congregation B’Nai Israel Rabbi Robert Silvers, who spoke on a panel along with Boys, said it’s unfortunate that a celebrity can use money to spread his own message. He likened the acceptance of the movie’s message to voting for an electoral candidate based on information gathered from commercials.

“‘How awful that now we’ll do that with religion,’ Silvers said. ‘Shame on us all if we don’t have the wherewithal to look into our own Bible, our own Scripture. ... Shame on us all if we don’t take the challenge of learning this for ourselves.’”

**The New York Post, March 18, 2004; Evan Thomas, Editor, Newsweek:**

“‘It’s just really a snuff film...for those who like that sort of thing.’ Thomas, *who admitted he hadn’t seen the picture*, called it ‘ugly, long and historically inaccurate...everyone knows Pontius Pilate did the whole thing.” [Emphasis added.]

**The Virginian-Pilot, March 13, 2004; Rabbi Michael Panitz of Temple Israel, Norfolk, VA:**

“The movie itself is filled with anti-Jewish stereotypes. The worst was the assistant chief priest, the fellow with the hook nose and the ugly gleam in his eye. That’s a stock figure going back to the medieval Passion play, repeated exactly in Nazi propaganda images and still used today in anti-Semitic cartoons.”

**Forward (NY), March 13, 2004:**

"The Justice Department is being urged to rule whether Mel Gibson's 'The Passion of the Christ' constitutes a hate crime. An Internet petition by the Messiah Truth Project urges Attorney General John Ashcroft to determine whether the controversial movie about Jesus' death violates hate-crime statutes because its portrayal of Jews amounts to 'antisemitic diatribe.'"

**Baltimore Jewish Times, March 12, 2004; Dr. Akiba Covitz, University of Richmond:**

"'I don't think the Jewish groups that reacted [to 'The Passion'] had a choice, given the Holocaust, and how people were silent for so long about creeping hate,' said Dr. Akiba Covitz, a political scientist at the University of Richmond. 'When you see something that runs even the risk of that, you have to act; your response has to be swift, it has to be almost extreme to get people to pay attention to the issue. Whether that contributes to Mel Gibson making more money is not relevant.'"

**Baltimore Jewish Times, March 12, 2004; Stephen Silberfarb, Executive Director, Jewish Community Relations Council of Minnesota and the Dakotas:**

"Mel Gibson was Jew baiting – and we took the bait on his terms."

**U.S. News and World Report, March 8, 2004; James Carroll:**

"It is a pornographic celebration of suffering."

**The Evangelist (Diocese of Albany, NY), March 23, 2004; Dr. Peter Zaas, Siena College:**

"'It's rampant with anti-Semitic images....'

"Dr. Zaas said he doesn't come from a religious tradition that

values suffering as an act of piety, so he was offended by Mr. Gibson's choice to focus so exclusively on Christ's suffering during the Passion. ...

"‘I didn't get anything from it except concern that someone was showing me these images on purpose: It was Mel Gibson crucifying Christ.'"

**The Dialog (Diocese of Wilmington, DE), March 2, 2004; Rabbi Charles Klein, New York Board of Rabbis:**

"Through our eyes, we saw something frightening. We saw the Jewish community portrayed as a ruthless mob."

**Peoria Journal Star, March 2, 2004; Rabbi Eugene Korn:**

"This kind of interpretation of the passion has had a very toxic history. In the past, there has been violence against Jewish property and lives after production [sic] similar to this one."

**Baltimore Sun, February 28, 2004; John Dominic Crossan, professor emeritus, DePaul University:**

"Anyone who handles this story must know they have to be terribly careful—I don't mean politically correct. Out of this story has come 2,000 years of anti-Semitic pogroms."

**Indianapolis Star, February 28, 2004; The Rev. Ron Allen, professor of New Testament studies, Christian Theological Seminary (Disciples of Christ), Indianapolis:**

"Its attack on Judaism is so destructive that it overpowers any other positive features. ...

"The damage done to the human community by this film's brutal picture of Judaism may be more harmful than the good intended by the filmmakers. I have to say that I think people are better off not seeing this film."

**Sun-Sentinel (FL), February 28, 2004; Rabbi Sheldon Jay Harr, Temple Kol Ami, Plantation, FL:**

“This movie has become an effective modern-day Passion Play. And Passion Plays have always pictured the Jews as bloodthirsty, satanic, hate-filled people.”

**Sun-Sentinel (FL), February 28, 2004; Rabbi Geoffrey Botnick, Temple Torah, West Boynton Beach, FL:**

“Some people will distort things from the movie, to serve their agenda. [The film] has the potential of changing the course of harmony between the Catholic Church and the Jewish people.”

**Atlanta Journal-Constitution, February 27, 2004; Kathleen M. O'Connor, Old Testament professor, Columbia Theological Seminary:**

“I found the suffering so extreme as to be pornographic.”

**Detroit Free Press, February 25, 2004; Rabbi Daniel Nevins, Adat Shalom Synagogue, Farmington Hills, MI:**

“As a Jew seeing this, it feels like we’ve gone back to a medieval us-versus-them model.”

**Newsday (NY), February 24, 2004; Dan Klores, independent filmmaker:**

“[Those who engineered the publicity for ‘The Passion of the Christ’] ought to be ashamed of themselves. They have appealed to neo-facist [sic] Holocaust deniers. They sold out for money. They are thoroughly cynical people.”

**Reuters, February 24, 2004; NY State Assemblyman Dov Hikind:**

“I don’t have any doubt this film will cause anti-Semitism. I don’t have any doubt that this film will result in violence. ...

“I don’t know the purpose of the extent of violence. But why

create hate? That's what the movie does.

"Nobody says 'dirty Jew' in the movie, but boy is the movie clear.

"It really is a blood libel against Jews. Mel Gibson has done a tremendous disservice to the real message of Jesus, which is about love."

**Reuters, February 24, 2004; David Weprin, chairman, New York City Council Finance Committee:**

"This is not the type of film we need in New York. It brings aback ancient divisions."

**Atlanta Journal-Constitution, February 23, 2004; John Dominic Crossan, professor emeritus, DePaul University:**

"John Dominic Crossan...said that accepting the view that God was ultimately responsible for Jesus' final hours reinforces twisted theology.

"'If you face the theology squarely, you're dealing with a God who would not forgive people but would take it out on his own son,' Crossan said. 'While it might make you love Jesus, it would not make you love God. You're dealing with someone who is close to a monster.'"

**Boston Herald, February 22, 2004; Michael Bohnen, Jewish Council for Public Affairs:**

"The Jewish community is not being paranoid here. There's a 1,000-year history of Passion sermons, Passion plays, sparking demonstrations and pogroms."

**San Francisco Chronicle (CA), February 22, 2004; Susan Bond, associate professor, Vanderbilt University Divinity School:**

"My concern about it is the use of graphic violence and heart-wrenching emotional trauma to get people to follow Jesus. It

seems to me enormously manipulative.”

**San Francisco Chronicle (CA), February 22, 2004; Rabbi Michael Lerner, editor, Tikkun:**

“The Gibson film is at least as much an assault on Christian liberals and progressives as it is on Jews. I hope Christians will take the lead in organizing people of all faiths to leaflet every public showing of Gibson’s film with a message that runs counter to the anger at Jews that this film is likely to produce.”

**Daily News (NY), February 21, 2004; Michael Evans, Jerusalem Prayer Team:**

“I don’t take the position that it might incite violence against Jews. I say it will incite violence against Jews.”

**San Jose Mercury News (CA), February 19, 2004; Bart Charlow, director, National Conference for Community and Justice:**

“‘Our biggest fear is that Gibson is treading on ancient and very dangerous grounds that have provoked anti-Semitism for hundreds of years,’ said Bart Charlow... The movie could provide a rationale for everything from slurs to synagogue firebombings, from which the Bay Area has not been immune, he said.”

**Boston Herald, February 18, 2004; Stephen Prothero, Boston University:**

“‘The Gospels don’t glory in violence the way Mel Gibson does. There’s something perverse in turning the Bible into an action movie,’ he [Prothero] said, suggesting that ‘Mad Max Goes to Galilee’ would be ‘truth in advertising.’”

**San Francisco Chronicle, February 17, 2004; Naomi Seidman, director, Center for Jewish Studies at the Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley:**

"This movie is a representation of the New Testament, which is a nasty little document. It's hard for Jews to read. ...

"You can't just reproduce the hateful atmosphere in which the Gospels were written. You have to understand the polemics of the time. Angry people say nasty, hurtful things. The New Testament arises out of that environment."

**Los Angeles Times, February 11, 2004; Mike Evans, evangelical minister:**

"I believe there is a serious crisis building here. ... Without an addition [a postscript to the film] of the kind we're urging, this film will be used to fuel anti-Semitism around the world. ...

"I told Mr. Gibson that night that 'I don't want my savior to be used as a sword to injure Jewish people.' ...

"I don't believe that Mel Gibson is an anti-Semite. I just don't think he's adequately researched the connection between this story, the account of Christ's Passion, and Jew hatred through history. There's no doubt that traditional Passion plays had a role in fueling hatred of Jews, including violence like the pogroms in Russia and Eastern Europe. Today, there are people throughout the Muslim world teaching their children the same evil myths about Jews that Hitler used. They're even doing it in schools."

**Philadelphia Inquirer, February 8, 2004; Burt Siegel, Jewish Community Relations Council, Philadelphia:**

"[Gibson] serves up the resurrected message of deicide."

**CBS, "The Early Show," January 26, 2004; Rene Syler (anchor):**

"Some critics say it's anti-Semitic because it blames Jews for the Crucifixion. In a TV interview Gibson does not deny it."

[To the extent that viewers accept Syler's conclusion, they

might think Gibson is a bigot; the comments she refers to are the following:

Gibson: "The film collectively blames *humanity* for the death of Jesus. Now there are no exemptions there. All right? I'm the first on the line for culpability—I did it. Christ died for all men, for all times."

Arroyo: "Including the Jewish people?"

Gibson: "Yeah. They're part of the human race..."]

**Orlando Sentinel, January 23, 2004; Rabbi Aaron Rubinger, Congregation Ohev Shalom:**

"Rabbi Aaron Rubinger of Congregation Ohev Shalom said 'The Passion of The Christ' was 'cinematically very powerful,' but it had the potential to become an 'ecumenical suicide bomb.' ...

"'[S]ome people will come away from this film with very powerfully negative feelings about Jews.'"

**The Jewish Week, December 26, 2003; Michael Signer, Professor of Jewish Thought, Notre Dame University:**

"It is time to admit that Catholic-Jewish relations in the United States have reached an all-time low in terms of the energy both sides are giving to the area. ...

"We need to see how deep the miasma is—and Gibson's film is just the symptom—not the cause. ... By the time we get to 2005 and the 40th anniversary of Nostra Aetate...there may be nothing much to celebrate."

**New York Post, November 17, 2003; Elizabeth Castelli, Assistant Professor of Religion, Barnard College, NY:**

"Jews are not fairly portrayed, especially the Jewish leadership. Their portrayal is unhistorical and drew upon Medieval stereotypes—stereotypes that have a history of

inspiring violence against Jews.

“‘I hope those images won’t inspire it today.”

**New York Post, November 17, 2003; The Rev. Mark Hallinan, S.J., St. Ignatius Loyola Church, NY:**

“‘It doesn’t touch on the values that [Jesus] represented and that continue to be a positive force in the world today. ...

“‘Unsophisticated people viewing the film will see Jews as cold, heartless people. ...

“‘It’s contrary to the Gospels. ... Jesus taught us not to persecute our enemies. ...

“Recommendation: ‘Don’t go to see it.’”

**New York Post, November 17, 2003; Rabbi Robert Levine, Vice President, New York Board of Rabbis:**

“Rabbi Robert Levine ‘would have walked out halfway through’ Mel Gibson’s ‘The Passion of Christ’....

“‘I was not prepared for this kind of movie. ... Not knowing what Mel Gibson’s motives are, my visceral reaction was that this is a hateful treatment of Jews.

“‘It hurt me as a Jew to watch it. ... It was the most appalling depiction of Jews in a film in my recollection. It was painful and inaccurate. ...

“‘I don’t think any person of faith should put a dime in Gibson’s coffers. ... This film could reopen wounds that have healed beautifully between Christian and Jews since Vatican II. ...

“Recommendation: ‘I hope no one goes to see it.’”

**New York Post, November 17, 2003; Lou Lumenick, New York Post film critic:**

"...By literally depicting Jews as 'Christ Killers,' [Mel Gibson] is going down a dangerous road that most Christian leaders abandoned decades ago. Unless Gibson provides some sort of historical context, he could—as his detractors charge—be fueling anti-Semitic feelings among less sophisticated Christian audience members."

**Daily Press (VA), October 25, 2003; Roy Anker, Professor of English, Calvin College:**

"Roy Anker, a professor of English at Calvin College who's written about Jesus films for Christianity Today, hasn't seen 'The Passion of Christ.' That is a problem, Anker said. ...

"'I don't think Gibson is anti-Semitic, but he's acting like it,' Anker said, 'judging from how dumb he's being about this.'"

**Scripps Howard News Service, October 1, 2003:**

"'The film is dangerous for Jews all over the world,' said Dov Hikind, a New York state assemblyman and Jewish activist. 'I am concerned that it will lead to violence against Jews.'"

**CNN, "CNN Live Sunday," August 31, 2003; Paul Clinton, CNN Correspondent:**

"He [Mel Gibson] is a very conservative man. He is very, very religious and it's this splinter group, this traditionalist sect of Catholicism that has everybody worried."

**August 29, 2003, Washington Times; Jewish leaders condemn film, by Liz Trotta:**

"'This film can potentially lead to violence directed against the Jewish community,' said Assemblyman Dov Hikind, an Orthodox Jew and Democrat from Brooklyn.

"'It will result in anti-Semitism and bigotry. It really takes us back to the Dark Ages ... the Inquisition, the Crusades, all

for the so-called sin of the Crucifixion of Jesus.' ...

"City Councilman Simcha Felder, a Brooklyn Democrat, said it appeared that Mr. Gibson had a passion for inciting hatred and bigotry, and that his movie should go straight to the video stores instead of theaters.

"Malka Moskowitz, an elderly woman from Brooklyn wearing a straw hat, said she was a Holocaust survivor and compared the atmosphere of dispute surrounding the movie with the bloody reign of the Third Reich. 'This is the way it started,' she said, her voice breaking.

"A rabbi from Brooklyn called the film pornography. He told Mr. Donohue that he would be responsible if violence broke out."

**CNBC, "Capital Report," July 22, 2003; Gloria Borger, Co-host:**

"Everyone at the super-secret screening was forced to sign a confidentiality agreement, but—and no surprise here—the details soon leaked out. And again no surprise, the handpicked crowd liked what it saw. "

### **Television**

**MSNBC "Scarborough Country," December 8, 2004; Rabbi Schmuley Boteach:**

"First of all, 'The Passion of the Christ' was an abomination for Christianity. It really should win the World Wrestling Federation Oscar for best movie. It's a guy for two hours being kicked, beaten, his blood gushing everywhere. It's just a diabolical, criminal, violent mess. ...

"It really is like Mohammed al-Zarqawi's movies on the Internet where a guy gets his head chopped off. It's gory. It's ugly and it's not inspiring. ...

"The reason why many Jews—I'm not among them—are fearful of

Christianity is, they`re tired of Christians saying that we`re a bunch of Christ killers. They`re tired of the lie that we killed Jesus. ...

"Pontius Pilate killed Jesus. And the sin of Mel Gibson is the same sin of Michael Moore. They both whitewash tyrants. Michael Moore whitewashes Saddam Hussein, and Mel Gibson whitewashes Pontius Pilate, who was the Saddam Hussein of the ancient world. That`s why Jews are afraid of Christians.

"Slander is slander, whether it leads to violence or not. "The Passion of the Christ" was historically fictitious, deeply libelous and slanderous movie portraying Jews killing one of their own. Jesus was an Orthodox Jew. He looked like me. He thought like me. ...

"Because my evangelical Christian brothers and sisters are desperate for any kind of wholesome, religious mainstream movie. And they`re so desperate, they`ll even take a violent, gory, bloody mess, which really looks like a World Wrestling Federation movie..."

**MSNBC "Scarborough Country," March 5, 2004; Rabbi Schmuley Boteach:**

"On the contrary, this movie is perfectly in line with Hollywood. It is a violent movie. It`s about blood and gore. This movie is Christianity as the cult of death. ...

"The fact is, this movie is ultimate act, sadly, of Christian desperation. Christianity is a great world religion. Why does it need to be so desperate, akin to Janet Jackson flapping out a boob at the Super Bowl? Now we have Jesus needing to be skinned alive in order for people to go to church?

"This is a guilt trip... This isn`t a statement of devotion or faith. The statement is, Jesus suffered so much, how could you not believe him in now?"

**MSNBC "Hardball," March 4, 2004; Rev. Andrew Greeley:**

"This is a movie about torture that's being justified on the grounds that it is Jesus' torture. I think it was sadomasochistic and pornographic."

**MSNBC "Hardball," February 27, 2004; Christopher Hitchens:**

"It's more of an exercise in lurid sadomasochism, and it's an awful appeal to superstition. ...

[When asked what in the film is worthy of condemnation]

"Well, it all depends on whether you like seeing handsome young men stripped and flayed alive over a long period of time. I don't.

"I know that Mr. Gibson has had problems with homosexuals in the past for making extremely crude and nasty remarks about them. One almost wonders what his homoerotic temptations are.

"There's no religion in the movie at all. There's no—I'm not a Christian. But there's no Christian precept. There's no understanding of what there guy is supposed to have stood for."

**ABC "Nightline," February 25, 2004; John Dominic Crossan, professor emeritus, DePaul University:**

"My immediate reaction [to the film], actually, was extreme revulsion. I've been asked, yes, but what was your spiritual reaction? And I said, extreme revulsion is a spiritual reaction. I thought I'd be watching two hours of utter brutality. Possibly the way it was, of course, but still, I was watching it to the point I was wondering if this has become violent pornography."

**CNN "News from CNN," February 25, 2004; David Denby, critic, *The New Yorker*:**

"It's extremely sadistic. And I don't see in any way it could

be called a spiritual experience.”

**Fox News Channel “On the Record with Greta Van Susteren,”  
February 24, 2004; Jonathan Foreman, critic, *New York Post*:**

“It’s so beyond the norm of even ordinarily violent movies... I thought it was not just gratuitous, but pornographic.”

### **Miscellaneous**

**Video USA, 90 Rancho Del Mar, Aptos, CA, August 31,  
2004; [letter to customers](#):**

“We abhor the effect “The Passion” will have on young people who accept it as a truthful depiction of history. We decline from making it available to those who might be adversely influenced by it and we refuse to profit from it.

“We lived in the time of the Holocaust. We lived when here in America there were unpunished lynchings. We lived in a time when gangs searched out and beat up “Christ Killers” as a celebration of Easter. ...

“We know the power film has in ‘teaching history.’ We remember Joseph Goebbels [sic], Hitler’s minister of propaganda, proving that if one tells people anything often enough they will believe it. Filmed epics, truthful or whimsical, often become reality in the minds of those with no contradicting experience.

“There are many good films with positive values which we are proud to offer. Consider watching [other films] instead of that invented pageant by the son of a man who insists that the Holocaust never happened.”

**Daily News (NY), March 1, 2004; unsigned editorial:**

“Gibson has filled ‘The Passion’ with deeply troubling images. They present a world peopled almost exclusively by scheming Jewish priests and bloodthirsty Jewish mobs. ...

"Gibson even turns Jewish children into monsters, literally. ...

"Christians who are baffled by the anti-Semitic allegations—and, indeed, many are baffled—need to understand that passion plays depicting Jews as murderers were used for centuries to stoke hatred and violence. They should also try to watch 'The Passion' through eyes other than their own and judge for themselves whether its images are at odds with the church's position."

**National Public Radio "Fresh Air," February 25, 2004; David Edelstein, Slate.com columnist:**

"What does this exercise in sadomasochism have to do with Christianity? I don't know. I do know that Gibson is an angry man with a victimization complex."

**"Imus in the Morning," September 24, 2003; Comedian Bill Maher:**

"I do think Mel Gibson is anti-Semitic."

**August 28, 2003; sign at protest urging News Corp. not to distribute "The Passion," New York:**

"THE PASSION IS A LETHAL WEAPON AGAINST JEWS."

**More Catholic League material on "The Passion":**

[VIDEO USA BANS "THE PASSION"](#) (*Catalyst*, 11/04)

[ATTACKS ON MEL CONTINUE](#) (*Catalyst*, 11/04)

[DVD SALES OF "THE PASSION" ENRAGE CRITICS](#) (9/17/04)

[PAULA COMMITS GENOCIDE](#) (*Catalyst*, 9/04)

[VIOLENCE AND "THE PASSION" \(PART ONE\)](#) (*Catalyst*, 6/04)

[VIOLENCE AND "THE PASSION" \(PART TWO\)](#) (*Catalyst*, 6/04)

["THE PASSION" CONTINUES TO EXCITE](#) (*Catalyst*, 5/04)

[TWO MONTHS AFTER "THE PASSION": BODY COUNT-ZERO](#) (4/21/04)

[PROMINENT CONSERVATIVES JOIN THE CHORUS AGAINST "THE PASSION"](#)(*Catalyst*, 4/04)

[EVEN PLAYING DIRTY DIDN'T WORK](#) (*Catalyst*, 4/04)

["THE PASSION OF THE CHRIST" SETS NEW RECORDS](#) (*Catalyst*, 4/04)

[ONE MONTH AFTER "THE PASSION": BODY COUNT-ZERO](#) (3/24/04)

[VATICAN SPOKESMAN: "THE PASSION" IS NOT ANTI-SEMITIC](#) (3/12/04)

[CRITICS OF "THE PASSION" CRACKUP](#) (3/8/04)

[CRITICS SEE PORN AND S&M IN "THE PASSION"](#) (3/5/04)

[ADL "PASSION" GUIDE FOR TEENS IS FLAWED](#) (3/3/04)

[NYPD MONITORS "THE PASSION" FOR HATE CRIME](#) (3/2/04)

["THE PASSION OF THE CHRIST" OPENS AMIDST FUROR](#)(*Catalyst*, 3/04)

[SAINT MEL](#) (2/26/04)

["PASSION" CRITICS EVINCE NEW PURITANISM](#) (2/24/04)

["THE PASSION" WOUNDS THEOLOGIANS' EGOS](#) (2/23/04)

[ATTACKING MEL'S DAD](#) (2/19/04)

[FOES OF "THE PASSION" CRACKING UP](#) (2/19/04)

[ABE FOXMAN NEEDS A REALITY CHECK](#) (2/18/04)

[FOX NEWS TWISTS FACTS ON GIBSON FILM](#) (2/13/04)

[IS MEL AN ANTI-SEMITES?](#) (2/12/04)

[WILL JEWS BE ASSAULTED AFTER "THE PASSION"?](#) (2/10/04)

[AN OPEN LETTER TO THE JEWISH COMMUNITY](#)

[DEMAND FOR "THE PASSION" TICKETS EXPLODES](#) (1/29/04)

[CRITICS OF "THE PASSION" PLAY DIRTY](#) (1/27/04)

[ADL INSULTS CHRISTIANS OVER MEL GIBSON'S FILM; APOLOGY REQUESTED](#) (1/26/04)

["THE EARLY SHOW" DISTORTS MEL GIBSON'S REMARKS](#) (1/26/04)

[POLITICS AND SPIN OVER "THE PASSION"](#) (1/23/04)

[2003 REPORT ON ANTI-CATHOLICISM: "THE PASSION OF THE CHRIST"](#)  
(2003 *Annual Report*)

[POPE GIVES KUDOS TO MEL GIBSON'S MOVIE](#) (12/17/03)

[VATICAN OFFICIALS GIVE KUDOS TO MEL GIBSON](#) (12/9/03)

[ADL TO HOST ATTACK ON MEL GIBSON](#) (11/4/03)

[THE MEL GIBSON CONTROVERSY AS SEEN THROUGH THE EYES OF AN ORTHODOX JEW](#) (*Catalyst*, 11/03)

[BILL MAHER BRANDS MEL GIBSON ANTI-SEMITIC](#) (9/24/03)

[ADL SEEKS TO POISON CATHOLIC-JEWISH RELATIONS](#) (9/18/03)

[REACTION TO MEL GIBSON'S FILM REACHES HYSTERICAL LEVEL](#) (8/27/03)

[ADL ATTACK ON "THE PASSION" IS UNFAIR](#) (8/12/03)

[THE NEW REPUBLIC LIBELS MEL GIBSON](#) (7/21/03)

[CATHOLIC BISHOPS DID NOT CONDEMN GIBSON MOVIE](#) (7/1/03)

[ADL ATTACKS MEL GIBSON](#) (6/25/03)

**Note on the Ad Hoc Committee:**

\* "Neither the Bishops' Committee for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, nor any other committee of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, established this group, or authorized, reviewed or approved the report written by its members" (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Office

of Communications: [Ecumenical and Interreligious Committee Responds To News Report](#), June 11, 2003).

“We regret that this situation has occurred, and offer our apologies. I have further advised the scholars group that this draft screenplay is not considered representative of the film and should not be the subject of further public comment. When the film is released, the USCCB will review it at that time” (Mark Chopko, general counsel for the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops).

“The [ad hoc committee members] do not represent either individually, or together, an official film review committee of the USCCB” (Letter from Rev. Arthur L. Kennedy, Executive Director, Secretariat for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops).

**The members of the Ad Hoc Committee are as follows:**

Sr. Mary C. Boys, Union Theological Seminary

Michael J. Cook, Hebrew Union College

Philip A. Cunningham, Boston College

Eugene J. Fisher, Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs,  
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

Paula Fredriksen, Boston University

Fr. Lawrence E. Frizzell, Seton Hall University

Eugene Korn, Anti-Defamation League

Amy-Jill Levine, Vanderbilt University

Fr. John T. Pawlikowski, Catholic Theological Union

\*\* This comment prompted the Catholic League to issue a news release on January 26, 2004, available [here](#).

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# **“Dogma”**

Special Report by *William Donohue*

*August 1999*

Click [here](#) to access the league’s booklet on “Dogma.”