

MEL GIBSON'S PASSION FILM

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The big news in Protestant, Catholic circles just now is the new motion picture about the crucifixion of Christ. You might want to know more about the background of this unusual film.

Filmed in Italy, financed by the motion picture actor, Mel Gibson, the \$25 million film, *The Passion of the Christ*, is focused on Jesus' final 12 hours. The characters speak Aramaic and Latin; and the film is subtitled in English. (The word, "passion," means *passus*, "having suffered" or "having undergone.") "Passion" is the Catholic name for the crucifixion of Christ.

We ourselves do not view it for several reasons. One is the fact that portraying Biblical events, especially events in the life of Christ, cannot but cheapen our view of what happened back then. Far better it is to reverently pray and read about the closing scenes in the life of Christ in the Bible and Spirit of Prophecy.

Another problem is that going to theaters encourages our youth to later attend them again.

The actor who portrayed Christ admitted, in a recent article in *Newsweek*, that he believes he swore at one of the "Roman guards" who accidentally struck him twice during filming instead of hitting the board in the middle of his back. That swearing was omitted from the final sound track. Was he a dedicated Christian at the time he was portraying Christ?

The motion picture actor, Mel Gibson (who produced the film), is a faithful, practicing Roman Catholic and also a devoted follower of the Catholic mystic, Anne Catherine Emmerich. His film is based on her book, *The Dolorous Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ*. A high-ranking priest, Carl E. Schmoger, wrote a reverential book about Emmerich's life, *The Life and Revelations of Anne Catherine Emmerich*.

When she entered a cloister as a nun, she began "levitating." **According to legend, at times the other nuns would see her floating in air above the ground.** She was also said to "bilocate"; that is, in vision, she witnessed important historical events, including the execution of Louis XVI, king of France. She is said to have visited Marie Antoinette in prison and held a conversation with her, leading to Marie's conversion.

She is revered by Gibson and thousands of other faithful Catholics, as a mystic who received many visions and also had the stigmata. The stigmata is the apparent bleeding wounds of Christ, in the same locations where He had them. **According to reports, her wounds were up to half-an-inch in size—on her hands,**

feet, side, and head; these bled profusely, especially on Fridays.

"In 1798 the Crown of Thorns was 'laid' upon her brow **by her 'heavenly spouse' [Christ]** as she prayed toward mid-day before a Crucifix in the organ loft."—*Michael H. Brown, in Spirit Daily, p. 4.*

In summarizing her life, she wrote in her book:

"All that is holy, all that is blessed, all that pertains to the [Catholic] Church, was as perfectly intelligible to me then as now, and I saw marvelous things of the Church's essence. I felt the Presence of God in the Most Blessed Sacrament. I saw the relics shining with light, and I recognized the saint who hovered above them."

It was after worshipfully reading about her life, that Mel Gibson was impressed that he must produce the film and pattern it after teachings she revealed. He devotedly carries one of her relics with him at all times.

"Gibson has amalgamated the four Gospel accounts **and was reportedly inspired by the visions of two nuns:** Mary of Agreda (1602-1665) of Spain and Anne Catherine Emmerich (1774-1824) of France; Emmerich experienced the stigmata on her head, hands, feet and chest—wounds imitating Jesus."—*Newsweek, February 16, 2004.*

According to *Christianity Today (March 4, 2004)*, here are two examples of non-Biblical additions to the film which Gibson got from Emmerich's visions, as quoted in her book, *Dolorous Passion*. Pilate's wife hands cloths to Christ's mother, Mary, so she can wipe up some of His blood. (2) A female devil appears to Christ in Gethsemane and tempts Him to not die for the world's sins.

Terry Mattingly, another devoted Catholic, in his *The Passion of Old Words and Symbols* explains that Gibson's objective in making the film was to bring everyone back to Rome.

"It is crucial to realize that **the images and language at the heart of *The Passion of the Christ* flow directly out of Gibson's personal dedication to Catholicism in one of its most traditional and mysterious forms: the 16th-century Latin Mass.**

" 'I don't go to any other services,' the director [Gibson] told the *Eternal Word Television Network*. 'I go to the old Tridentine Rite. That's the way that I first saw it when I was a kid. So I think that that

informs one's understanding of how to transcend language. . . **The goal of the movie is to shake modern audiences by brashly juxtaposing 'the sacrifice of the cross with the sacrifice of the altar [the mass]—which is the same thing,'** said Gibson.

"The ancient union of symbols and sounds has never lost its hold on him. **There is, he stressed, 'a lot of power in these dead languages.'** Thus, the seemingly bizarre choice of Latin and Aramaic [as the only languages spoken in the film] was actually part of the message."

The following news clip gives us additional details:

"Mel Gibson to Produce Film on Christ's Passion, Rome, Sept. 6, 2002 (Zenit)—**Mel Gibson is in Italy to finalize details for the filming of a movie** on the passion and death of Jesus, a Hollywood trade publication reports.

"*Variety* magazine said **the Australian actor-producer sought advice from Vatican experts** for 'Passion,' which will be produced by his *Icon Productions*. **The film will be faithful to Gibson's Catholicism, the magazine added.**

"Gibson has decided on actor Jim Caviezel to play the role of Jesus. **Caviezel, also a Catholic,** is acclaimed for his roles in *The Count of Monte Cristo* and *High Crimes*.

"The Spanish newspaper *La Razón* reported that the filming will begin in mid-September, coinciding with the Roman fall, which in Gibson's words will bring 'the right light to recreate the particular atmosphere I want.'

"Gibson and two aides traveled to Sassi di Matera early last month in preparation for filming. Sources speculate that filming may take place in the nearby town of Craco."—*Zenit, September 6, 2002.*

In a December 21, 2003, *in-person* interview with Jim Caviezel (Hollywood actor who impersonated Christ in the film), the following information was provided:

"**Jim Caviezel was already a devout Catholic when he got the role** of Christ in Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* . . . Register staff writer Tim Drake interviewed him on the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe . . .

"**Was there anything in particular Gibson had you do to prepare for this part?**

"Mel and I are just administrators of God's work, and that's all that we continually ask for. And that's why **we centered every day on the Mass and receiving the Eucharist. There was not one day that I was on film that I didn't receive Communion. I just try to be the best Catholic . . .**

"I've always made acting follow truth, and **Mary has always pointed me toward that truth. I really believe that she was setting me up, getting me ready to play her Son. She architected this whole thing.**

"People have asked me, 'Were you scared about getting this film?' " And I say, 'Yes, a part of me. But the other part of me says that **I'm absolutely honored that he, through Mary, would pick me to play this role.**'

"How has playing the part of Christ impacted how you pray the rosary?"

"**'Before going to the set every day, I prepared myself in mediation or through the rosary, always through Mary. I also went to confession** and the Holy Spirit would convict me of my sins. Once I'd done that, the rest was very fundamental; it really was.' "—*Register, December 21, 2003.*

"The long scene where Jesus gets scourged with metal lashes is incredibly difficult to watch.

"There was a board on my back, about a half-inch thick, so the Roman soldiers wouldn't hit my back. But one of the soldiers missed, hit me flush on the back and ripped the skin right off. I couldn't scream, I couldn't breathe. It's so painful that it shocks your system. **I looked over at the guy, and probably said the F word. Within a couple of strokes he missed again.** There's like a 14-inch scar on my back.' "—*Newsweek, February 16, 2004, p. 53.*

After viewing an advance showing of the film, Pope John Paul officially announced that it has his fullest blessing.

"Papal Praise for 'The Passion'

"'It Is as It Was,' John Paul II Says

"New York, Dec. 18, 2003 (zenit)—Mel Gibson's 'The Passion of the Christ' gains a new admirer: the Holy Father.

"According to various news sources, John Paul II is the latest to see Gibson's movie on Christ's passion the weekend before last, in the Vatican . . .

"Afterward, and with an eloquent economy [brevity of words], John Paul shared with Archbishop Dziwisz his verdict. The latter, in turn, later shared John Paul's five-word response with the co-producer of the movie, Steve McEveety.

"This is what the Pope said: 'It is as it was.'

"In a recent piece in the *Opinion Journal*, columnist Peggy Noonan, a contributing editor of the *Wall Street Journal*, notes that **the Pope joins other leading Church figures, such as Cardinal Dario Castrillón Hoyos, prefect of the Congregation for Clergy, who have praised the film and even suggested that all priests see it.**"—*Zenit, December 18, 2003.*

Although containing visions given by spirits to Catholic mystics, Protestants love the film too.

"Mel Gibson told CT: 'I've been actually amazed at the way I would say the evangelical audience has—hands down—responded to this film more than any other Christian group.' What makes it so amazing he says is that 'the film is so Marian' [so centered on Mary] . . . And Gibson goes beyond many Catholics when he calls her 'a tremendous co-redemptrix and mediatrix.' "—*Christianity Today, March 2004.*

"This evangelical enthusiasm for *The Passion of the Christ* may seem a little surprising, in that the movie was shaped from start to finish by a devout Roman Catholic and by an almost medieval Catholic vision."—*Ibid.*

The film was slated for release on an important Catholic holy day: Ash Wednesday, February 25, 2004, all at once in 3,500 theaters.