

Introductory Note: In May 2003, a group of four Catholic and three Jewish scholars – convened by specialists at the Secretariat for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and the Anti-Defamation League – submitted to Mel Gibson a confidential analysis of a shooting script of a film then called *The Passion*

Report of the Ad Hoc Scholars Group **Reviewing the Script of *The Passion***

May 2, 2003

Dr. Mary C. Boys, SNJM

Skinner & McAlpin Professor of Practical Theology
Union Theological Seminary, New York

Dr. Michael J. Cook

Sol & Arlene Bronstein Professor of Judeo-Christian Studies
Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati

Dr. Philip A. Cunningham

Executive Director, Adjunct Professor of Theology
Center for Christian-Jewish Learning at Boston College

Dr. Eugene J. Fisher

Associate Director, Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

Dr. Paula Fredriksen

Aurelio Professor of Scripture
Boston University

Rev. Dr. Lawrence E. Frizzell

Director, Institute of Judaean-Christian Studies
Seton Hall University, East Orange

Rabbi Dr. Eugene Korn

Director, Office of Interfaith Affairs
Anti-Defamation League, New York

Dr. Amy-Jill Levine

Carpenter Professor of New Testament Studies
Vanderbilt University, Nashville

Dr. John T. Pawlikowski, OSM

Prof. of Social Ethics, Catholic-Jewish Studies Director
Catholic Theological Union, Chicago





E. The present script uses or ignores New Testament texts without regard for Catholic principles of biblical interpretation.

1. The script seems unaware that when the gospe

III. General Recommendations

1. The Roman nature of Jesus' execution must be stressed. He was executed by the method used by the Empire to deal with seditionists. His crime was generating public enthusiasm for the coming "Kingdom/Reign of God," which would by definition transcend and supplant the Roman Empire and all other human governments.
2. Pontius Pilate must be presented as the superior of Caiaphas. It must be made clear that Caiaphas served as High Priest only with Rome's assent. Caiaphas depended on staying in Pilate's good graces to remain High Priest. It is impossible on the basis of the available evidence to discern who took the lead in executing Jesus.
3. To make them fully developed dramatic characters the complementary yet distinct motives of Pilate and Caiaphas should be made explicit. Pilate wants to prevent a Passover riot. He orders the crucifixion of one more Jewish messianic preacher to impose order. Caiaphas wants to avoid a popular riot (Mk 14:2) to protect the Temple and his people from the Romans (John 11: 47-50). He is not necessarily thrilled that the Roman crucifixion of another Jew may be necessary to do this.
4. It must be indicated that everything was done in haste. Jesus was arrested and sentenced

Appendix 2

A Historical Reconstruction of the Execution of Jesus

Four Gospel Portraits. All four gospels know that, since Jesus was crucified, Rome had to have ordered the execution. All four name Passover as the holiday during which Jesus died. The synoptic (“seen-together”) tradition - Matthew, Mark, and Luke - hold that Jesus’s last supper was a seder; John has the final meal be the last meal before Passover begins, i.e., it’s *not* a seder.

All four impute priestly collusion with the Roman prefect, but they provide different motivations and descriptions of events. In the synoptic tradition, Jesus comes to the negative attention of the priests by overturning the moneychangers’ tables in the Temple court. In John, they are anxious that Rome will react to Jesus’ mission by “destroying the nation and the Temple” (Jn 11:48).

In all four Jesus is arrested secretly because he is so popular. “The chief priests and the scribes were seeking how to arrest him by stealth, and kill him, for they said, ‘Not during the feast, lest there be a tumult of the people,’” (e.g., Mk 14:2). Matthew, Mark and Luke show Jesus ensnared by a “crowd”: these people are civilians. John depicts a mixed contingent of specifically Roman soldiers and “some officers of the chief priests,” that is, the Temple guard. In all four, once Jesus is arrested, he is simply led away to the residence of the high priest.

The gospels do not explain the sudden wholesale defection of the Jerusalem crowd between nightfall (when Jesus is so popular

436hoxpl3J

Thficer high p 76akdcvrpy li0 TD

A Basic Reconstruction. Pilate and Caiaphas colluded in the death of Jesus. Which of the two initiated his arrest is impossible to determine. Jesus' words and deeds on behalf of a coming "Kingdom of God" were enough to convince Pilate that Jesus should be preemptively removed from the scene as a warning to the thousands of Jewish pilgrims in Jerusalem for Passover.

Appendix 3



- When Jesus is scourged, Annas “is MESMERIZED by a DISPLAY ... the TORTURE ul3scn-5areEnow put

Appendix 5

Selected Quotations from Official Catholic Documents

- **Introduction: The Catholic Church, the Bible, and the Jews**

Although some Christian communities have adopted the principle that there is no other authority for Christians than the Bible, this has never been the understanding of the Catholic Church. The Catholic perspective is that the Bible is the “Church’s book.” It is the foundational written authority for Christians. It was assembled within the Church, its New Testament books were composed within first-century churches, and it is interpreted in the Church for each generation. History shows that the Bible has been misused to justify war and violence, racial segregation and slavery, and antisemitism. Thus, the Catholic Church encourages all the faithful to study and pray with the Bible, but is also concerned that it be read attentively and wisely.

For Pope John Paul II this need for an informed reading of the Bible has special significance in regard to Jews. “In the Christian world,” he stated in 1997, “erroneous and unjust interpretations of the New Testament regarding the Jewish people and their alleged culpability [for the crucifixion] have circulated for too long, engendering feelings of hostility towards this people.”

The Pope’s concern is exemplified in a recent e-mail received by a member of the ad hoc group. The sender declared: “Matthew 27:25 clearly tells us that ‘Then all the people answered, His blood be on us, and on our children.’ How strange for Jews or Christians to complain when Jews are merely being given that which they requested! ... Contrary to pious-sounding deluded attempts to get Jews (or others) off the hook, these solemn words show a consciousness that the Jewish people recognized their guilt and were even proud of it.” This hardly unusual e-mail shows how animosity towards Jews easily arises when the passion narratives are naively read as if they contained verbatim historical transcripts.

The Catholic Church’s biblical concerns in regard to Jews are augmented by an awareness of the long history of Christian teaching of contempt for Jews and Judaism. Cardinal Edward Cassidy, the recently retired Vatican official responsible for Catholic-Jewish relations, summed up this history quite well in a 1998 speech:

There can be no denial of the fact that from the time of the Emperor Constantine on, Jews were isolated and discriminated against in the Christian world. There were expulsions and forced conversions. Literature propagated stereotypes, preaching accused the Jews of every age of deicide; the ghetto which came into being in 1555 with a papal bull became in Nazi Germany the antechamber of the extermination.

This is why Pope John Paul II prayed for God’s forgiveness for the sins of Christians against Jews at both the Basilica of St. Peter and the Western Wall:

God of our fathers, you chose Abraham and his descendants to bring Your name to the nations: we are deeply saddened by the behavior of those who in the course of history have caused these [Jewish] children of Yours to suffer and asking Your forgiveness we wish to commit ourselves to genuine brotherhood with the people of the Covenant.

The following quotations, therefore, should be understood as part of a process of reconciliation and penitence, an effort to be more faithful to the Good News of Jesus Christ.



•

The Role of Pilate. Certain of the gospels, especially the two latest ones, Matthew and John, seem on the surface to portray Pilate as a vacillating administrator who himself found "no fault" with Jesus and sought, though in a weak way, to free him. Other data from the gospels and secular sources contemporary with the events portray Pilate as a ruthless tyrant. We know from these latter sources that Pilate ordered