

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*. Their work had been agreed to by Mr. Gibson, though he did not directly provide the script. Although the report has been circulated among some people to whom Mr. Gibson showed pre-release versions of the movie, the scholars group has not made its report public. Now that the film has opened, the group makes its report available for those who might be interested in comparing its findings to the finished film as just released. Except for some added or dropped scenes, the final version of the film is, in most places, close or even identical to the script that the group read.

## **Report of the Ad Hoc Scholars Group**

### **Reviewing the Script of *The Passion***

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## I. Introduction

The ad hoc group of Catholic and Jewish scholars was assembled by Dr. Eugene Fisher of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and Rabbi Dr. Eugene Korn of the Anti-Defamation League in order to assess and offer recommendations on the script of *The Passion*. We do so readily since the relationship between Jews and Christians is a central concern to each of us.

We begin this task with an awareness of the tragic impact of Christian “passion plays” on Jews over the centuries. We know that their dramatic presentation of Jews as “Christ killers” triggered pogroms against Jews over the centuries and contributed to the environment that made the Shoah possible. Given this history and the power of film to shape minds and hearts, both Catholics and Jews in the ad hoc group are gravely concerned about the potential dangers of presenting a passion play in movie theatres.

The Catholic members of the ad hoc group are all part of an appointed advisory committee that offers counsel to the U.S. bishops on developments in the Catholic-Jewish relations. They are all committed to the process of Catholic-Jewish rapprochement launched by the Second Vatican Council. This process includes:

- Numerous Catholic magisterial statements mandating Catholic-Jewish reconciliation and reversing centuries of teaching contempt for Jews and Judaism.
- Pope John Paul II repeatedly praying for God’s forgiveness for the sins that Christians have committed against Jews over the past millennium and publicly committing the Catholic Church, at Jerusalem’s Western Wall, to “genuine fellowship with the People of the Covenant.”

The Jewish members of the ad hoc group (and their children) know personally the effects of being called “Christ-killers.” They recently have received anxious inquiries about *The Passion* from the wider Jewish community, fearing an upsurge in this particularly hurtful accusation.

All the members of the ad hoc group have witnessed a dramatic increase in antisemitism worldwide as a result of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and other international disputes. They have observed an increase in attacks against Jews living nowhere near the sites of conflict, especially in Europe. They have seen the age-old canard of “Christ-killers” propagated widely over Internet websites and airwaves in the Islamic world.

After recent press reports, ad hoc group members were understandably concerned that a graphic movie presentation of the crucifixion could reawaken the very antisemitic attitudes that we have devoted our careers to combating. For Jews, this intensifies fears and insecurities. For Catholics, it threatens to reverse the building of a new relationship with Jews and impede acceptance of correct Church teachings regarding the Passion, Judaism and the Jewish people.

We therefore welcome the opportunity to offer our observations and expertise. We will provide critiques and constructive suggestions for improving the film so as to produce genuine religious inspiration for viewers, while avoiding the prejudice and hatred against the Jewish people that so frequently accompanied passion plays historically.

## II. Summary of the Group's Responses

Members of the Ad Hoc Scholars Group concluded unanimously that:

**A. A film based on the present version of the script of *The Passion* would promote antisemitic sentiments.** (See Appendices 3-4 for details.)

1. Caiaphas is the moving force behind all events, whereas Pilate is effectively powerless. The high priests are shown delighting in the physical abuse inflicted upon Jesus, while Pilate is shocked by it. Caiaphas' machinations will too easily be seen as epitomizing "Jewish" wickedness.
2. The Temple – and by extension Judaism - is presented as a locus of evil: Jesus' unusually large cross is manufactured there and Jesus is physically abused there at night before a violent mob of Jews. This torment is said to occur adjacent to the Holy of Holies, a locale seemingly targeted by dramatic earth tremors when Jesus dies. Collectively, these elements uniformly project a negative view of Judaism and the Jewish people.
3. A Jewish mob is shown in ever-increasing size and ferocity. The mob is plainly identified as representing the Jewish people as a whole, portraying them as such as "bloodthirsty," "frenzied," and "predatory". The Roman soldiers who flay Jesus are depicted as urged on by demonic forces, while Jews need no such supernatural stimulation for their wickedness. The few Jewish characters sympathetic to Jesus do not offset the disproportionately numerous hostile Jews.
4. Jewish figures are particularly associated with evil uses of money. The high priest, e.g., is careful to signal an underling to collect up the "blood money" that a distraught Judas has flung at his "opulent robes." While it is true that the priestly elites were rich, the script also shows them using their wealth to corrupt a large number ordinary Jews, something for which there is scant historical or biblical evidence.

**B. The present script contains significant historical errors.**

Recent press reports have described the film's producers as "striving for a perfect reproduction of the passion – from the ancient languages spoken at the time of Jesus right down to his bloody wounds" [*National Catholic Register*, web edition, March 16-22, 2003]. Unless this interest in historical accuracy is restricted to depictions of physical injuries, we do not understand how Latin could be spoken instead of Greek, or how the major errors listed below could be tolerated:

1. The script fundamentally misconceives the relationship between the prefect, Pontius Pilate, and the Temple authorities led by Caiaphas. Caiaphas served at Rome's pleasure. Yet the script shows him bullying Pontius Pilate with an amazing control of the Jewish mob. Pilate even states he fears Caiaphas is plotting a revolt. This is a total reversal of the historical reality of Judea under Roman rule. (See Appendix 1.)

2. The script's sympathetic depiction of Pilate is uninformed by historical sources of information about him. (See Appendix 5, page 18.)
3. The physical layout of the Temple presupposed in the script does not correspond with archaeological facts. There was no "Great Hall" in proximity to the Holy of Holies where a sanhedrin and a large Jewish crowd could assemble for a night-time trial of Jesus. The Temple precincts were locked and guarded at night making the free flow of people in and out virtually impossible. There were no pillars near the Holy of Holies. (See Appendix 1.)
4. In the time of Jesus, Romans crucified those Jews they suspected of sedition routinely. Golgotha was an execution site with vertical posts of about six feet in height permanently mounted in the earth. There is no historical basis for a "15 feet x 8 feet" cross for Jesus and absolutely no evidence that crosses of any kind were built by Jews in the Temple.
5. The script overlooks the implications that these events occurred around Passover. Jesus is shown slaying the Passover lamb in a private room, instead of him making the offering in the Temple with the rest of his people. It also fails to see the difficulty in having large numbers of Jewish leaders and people conspiring and meeting and moving in and out of the Temple on the first night of Passover when they had many other religious duties.

**C. Dramatically, as the script stands, Jesus' opponents are one-dimensional "bad guys."**

The motives of the principal characters – Caiaphas, Annas, Pilate, and even Jesus - are unexplained. The reasons for some of the brutality inflicted on Jesus are unexplained, indeed sometimes it is literally because "the devil made me do it." Such poor character development is not true-to-life. The drama and pathos seems almost entirely driven by violence.

**D. The portrayal of the person and mission of Jesus is partial and skewed.**

1. The film fixes our gaze on a tortured creature—the cross is so much the focus that the significance of Jesus' life is obscured. The script takes us back to the High Middle Ages in its fascination with the pain of Jesus. Indeed, the film takes every opportunity to embellish the violence of the passion, thereby increasing the likelihood of an audience to be filled with outrage at those who perpetrated such a horrendous crime.
2. Thus, viewers learn virtually nothing about the ministry of Jesus, of his preaching and teaching about God's Reign, his distinctive table companionship, his mediation of God's gracious mercy. Instead, we are presented only with a body to be tormented, one who literally embraces his cross and removes his own clothes for scourging.
3. The script's brutality - including unattested added elements such as the placement of the cross face down with Jesus attached in order to bend back the protruding nail points – was overwhelming. Without some understanding of the meaning of Jesus' entire life, the inventive cruelty produces a theology of pain – the more Jesus is tortured the greater is his love and, by implication, the more the Father's desires are being obeyed.

**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 gospels were written, decades after the events they portray, the evangelists to varying degrees wanted to avoid Roman persecutions. In diverse ways they downplayed the historical fact that their Lord had been crucified for sedition by order of a Roman prefect. Thus, Luke portrays Pilate declaring Jesus innocent three times; Matthew shows Pilate washing his hands of the affair; and John has Pilate shuttling inside and outside the Praetorium, physically demonstrating his indecisiveness. The script simply treats each of these distinctive strategies as historical facts. It then uses all three techniques, thereby adding a cumulative power to the evangelists' individual efforts to shift responsibility from Pilate onto Jewish figures.
2. Similarly, disputes decades after the crucifixion between the evangelists' churches and local Jewish communities about the status and authority of Jesus influence the gospels' telling of the story of the passion. The script is unaware that "blasphemy" applied to Jesus during his life would have meant arrogant presumption, but in the post-resurrectional era of the gospel writers would involve Christian claims of Jesus' divinity. The script's naïve use of blasphemy makes the deadly issue a more "religious," and hence a more "Jewish" one.
3. The script selects elements from among the four different gospel versions of the passion without any obvious method of selection. It chooses, e.g., to follow John's Gospel in having the scourging be Pilate's stratagem to free Jesus. Mark and Matthew, probably with greater historical accuracy, present the scourging as a normal preliminary to a Roman crucifixion, while Luke omits it entirely. This choice has inevitable anti-Jewish consequences when Pilate in scene 63 must present the tortured Jesus to the crowd. Similarly, it opts to present a formal Sanhedrin "trial" of Jesus (held impossibly in the Temple itself instead of the high priest's residence as all four gospels indicate.) However, the Gospel of John offers another choice, describing only a "hearing" at dawn (Jn 18:19).

**F. For these reasons the present script violates many magisterial Catholic documents, including several Vatican instructions.**

As the selected quotations in Appendix 5 show, the Catholic Church insists that when dealing with the passion of Jesus, "all must take care, lest in catechizing or in preaching the word of God, they teach anything which is not in accord with the truth of the Gospel message or the spirit of Christ" (Vatican Council II, *Nostra Aetate*, 4). The script, regrettably, too often violates this fundamental norm by:

1. Utilizing the four distinct passion narratives haphazardly in ways that increase and sensationalize "Jewish" culpability;
2. Utilizing the four distinct passion narratives without regard for their apologetic and polemical features;

3. Failing to incorporate historical studies;
4. Adding scenes without any historical or even naïve biblical warrant that increases the guilt of Jewish characters, e.g., the egregious scenes 48 and 49;
5. Failing to present the theological meaning of the passion in any significant way.

Viewers without extensive knowledge of Catholic teaching about interpreting the New Testament will surely leave the theater with the overriding impression that the bloodthirsty, vengeful and money-loving Jews simply had an implacable hatred of Jesus. Catholic leaders informed by the Church's numerous official documents on Catholic-Jewish relations would denounce such an outcome.

**G. The above problems are embedded throughout the script. Substantive revisions of numerous scenes are required to correct them.**

We believe that the steps needed to correct these difficulties will require major revisions. The characterizations of the major characters – Jesus, Pilate, Caiaphas – all require new scripting. If scenes have been filmed of large crowds who display the inhuman qualities called for by the script, these, too, should be replaced.

We realize that such significant alterations will be expensive and time-consuming, but without such revisions the film will inflict serious damage and in all likelihood be repudiated by most Christian and Jewish institutions.

### 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 quickly and clandestinely because of his popularity among his Jewish contemporaries (N.B. Mark 14:2). Jesus is to be crucified as a warning before the incendiary Passover period.
5. The Jewish "crowd" must be small, perhaps two dozen people. They are underlings of the chief priests, not the Jewish nation. The greater the magnitude and frenzy of this "crowd," the more likely the film will stimulate antisemitic sentiments in audiences. Jews hostile to Jesus should be depicted as one group of Jews out of many and be better balanced by other positive Jewish figures who are not disciples of Jesus. Since the Pharisees are notably absent in the gospels' passion narratives, if they are presented at all in the deliberations over Jesus' fate, they should be depicted both negatively and positively. The content of conversations between the high priest and the prefect must be carefully constructed.
6. Jesus' death must be related to his ministry on behalf of the Reign of God. The nature of God's rule, as opposed to the rule of human empires, could be contrasted by recalling pertinent parables. Jesus should be presented as a model of faith - remaining steadfast in his proclamation of the Kingdom no matter what the cost, foreseeing his own suffering as contributing to its establishment (N.B. Mark 14:25 and parallels).
7. Overall, the film should present the passion of Jesus as a reflection of the Jewish plight under the brutal Roman occupation and part of the suffering of the Jewish people of the day.
8. The Roman procedure for crucifixion was sadistic and brutal enough. In order to avoid undermining the movie's historical credibility and serious religious content, the script's additional scenes of gratuitous cruelty, unattested in the gospels themselves, should be eliminated.



## Appendix 1 Roman Imperial Rule in Judea

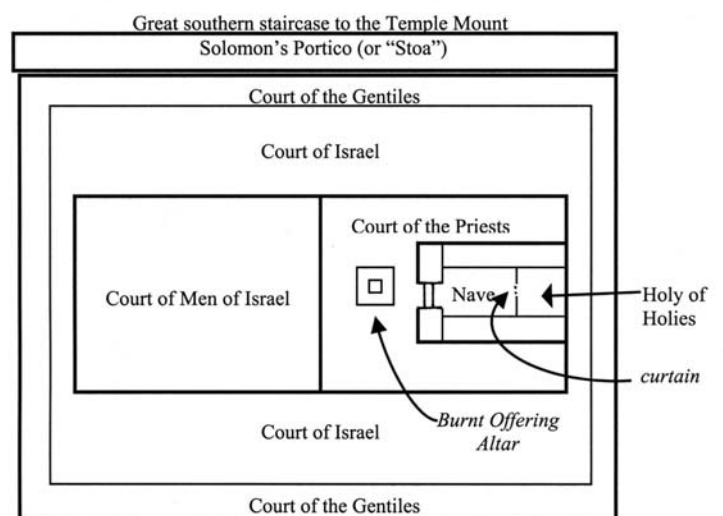
Judea was under ‘direct’ Roman rule from A.D. 6 to A.D. 41, and again from 44 until the first Jewish revolt began in 66. Like modern empires, Rome sub-contracted to indigenous elites. In Judea, domestic government radiated from Jerusalem, and was the particular responsibility of the High Priest, *who served as an ‘appointee’ of Rome*. He was responsible to Rome for keeping the peace. He also oversaw the governance of the city and the operation of the Temple.

Local Roman government sat in Caesarea Maritima, on the coast. The prefect, who was a Roman, employed roughly 3000 troops, mostly infantry and a few cavalry. These men were *not* ‘Roman’: they were locals hired from Syria. The prefect and his army came to Jerusalem three times a year, during the Jewish pilgrimage festivals, to facilitate crowd control, since the city could be flooded with upwards of 400,000 pilgrims. Otherwise, a tiny contingent of troops in Rome’s employ was quartered at the Antonia tower, near the Temple.

The High Priest employed a few hundred Temple guards. These functioned as a sort of domestic police force, both for the city and especially for the Temple area. The Temple precinct in Jesus’ lifetime was enormous: the wall around the outer perimeter ran almost 9/10<sup>th</sup> of a mile. Both the outer wall and the inner wall had huge gates of heavy wood, each inner gate was about 1000 square feet. These were made heavier by their overlay of precious metal. *These gates were closed every evening, and opened every morning*. From sunset to sunrise, the interior of the Temple precinct was inaccessible to people outside. Since the Temple contained many valuable items - contributions, precious metals, sacred objects - the Temple police guarded these gates, and it took a lot of men to move them. People did not move in and out of the Temple at night.

The actual sanctuary of the Temple was a small roofed building at the heart of the complex. It had two chambers. The outer chamber held an altar and a candelabrum. The inner chamber, the ‘Holy of Holies,’ was entirely empty. The two chambers were divided by a curtain; the High Priest alone went into this part of the Temple, and only on one day a year, Yom Kippur. It was otherwise inaccessible and, of course, to anyone but the high priest, completely invisible.

In the event of any domestic turmoil or trouble, both the High Priest and the Prefect would have to answer to the Emperor. Getting into trouble meant, usually, losing the job. The priests would, naturally, want to shield their own people as much as possible from problems with imperial power; and both the prefect and the High Priest had a vested interest in promoting and ensuring domestic calm.



**Herod’s Expanded Second Temple**

Although there are various identifications for the courtyards, the layout of buildings and walls is fairly well established.

## 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 that he has to be apprehended by stealth) and dawn (when the the crowd cries for Barabbas.) The gospels are also not clear on why Barabbas is freed: in the Synoptics, the release of a prisoner is *Pilate’s custom* (Mt 27:15); in John, it’s *the people’s custom* (Jn 18:39). The gospels also show the priests walking in the killing field during the crucifixion, which would have been impossible for them to do on Passover. Serving at the Temple on a high holy day, they certainly could not risk corpse impurity. These difficulties have led most scholars to conclude that these episodes are not historical as depicted, but stem from the apologetic and polemical concerns of the evangelists.

Historical Considerations. Jesus of Nazareth was crucified around AD 30, in Jerusalem, during a Passover holiday when Caiaphas was High Priest and Pilate was prefect. The fact that he was killed means that he had enemies. If the priests in Jerusalem had simply wanted him dead, Jesus could have been ‘privately’ murdered, or killed off-stage; but he wasn’t. If the priests had wanted him dead but for some reason were constrained from killing him, they could have asked Pilate to kill Jesus, and Pilate could easily have done so by any of the considerable means at his disposal (assassination, murder in prison, and so on).

The fact that Jesus was publicly executed specifically by crucifixion means that *Rome* wanted him dead. The point of such a *public* execution was to communicate a message. Crucifixion implies, further, that Rome was concerned about *sedition*; and that Rome was concerned specifically to disabuse the Jews gathered for Passover of any thought of sedition. Historically, disturbances and riots during the Passover’s celebration of freedom from foreign oppression were not uncommon. According to a Jewish historian contemporary with the evangelists, “It is on these festive occasions [i.e., the pilgrimage holidays] that sedition is most apt to break out” [Josephus, *Jewish War*, 1:88].

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. Jesus' Kingdom preaching and criticisms of the priestly leadership were enough to persuade Caiaphas that this popular Galilean could incite anti-Roman agitation and so move the Romans to act against the people and destroy the Temple that he was responsible to protect. The high priest was not necessarily personally popular with the people, so he had additional reasons to move carefully in his efforts to maintain the peace.

Caiaphas orchestrated Jesus' nighttime arrest out of sight of the general public; perhaps together with a few priestly colleagues, he questioned him; and then, possibly at dawn, he dispatched Jesus to Pilate for execution. This outcome was likely determined in advance, but the precise content of conversations or disagreements between Pilate and Caiaphas or their subordinates are inaccessible to contemporary historians. Mark 15:25 depicts Jesus being crucified at 9 a.m., before most of Jerusalem would have even been aware of Jesus' arrest, and this is consistent with the need for haste before the Passover and/or the Sabbath.

### Appendix 3

## The Script's Presentation of the "Crowd"

The script tells us the following about the crowd—i.e., the Jews. The crowd:

- Surrounds Peter, “the UNCOMPOSED ENERGY of their HATEFUL MOCKING and VIOLENT TAUNTS causes him to freeze with fear.” Peter is “AWARE of the BLOODTHIRSTY nature of the rising chaos.” [scene 31]
- Causes “brouhaha in the Temple,” a “CRAZED FRENZY.” [scene 33a]
- Is a “MOB of energized people;” EXPLODES in jeers and invectives before Pilate: SHOUTS, JEERS, etc. Their noise is deafening [scene 41]
- Increases to double its original size, becoming MORE RESTLESS, LOUDER, MORE UNPREDICTABLE [scene 52]
- It is an “enraged mob,” alarming even Pilate by its virulence. The Roman soldiers have to “DRAW THEIR SWORDS and LOCK SHIELDS” in defense. [scene 52]
- It responds to the judgment of Caiaphas and Annas that Jesus be crucified with a RENEWED, DEAFENING ROAR. “Pilate is obviously intimidated by the crowd’s mood.” Their shouts, CRUCIFY HIM, CRUCIFY HIM “gain in power.” [scene 52]
- The “bloodthirsty roar” of the Pharisees—part of the crowd—evokes a frown from Pilate [scene 52]
- Echoes the words of Caiaphas to “CRUCIFY HIM! They fill THE PRAETORIUM WITH A GREAT DIN: ‘CRUCIFY HIM.’” Caiaphas repeats the call for crucifixion. “Another DEAFENING ROAR: ‘CRUCIFY HIM’ from the crowd “startles and intimidates Pilate.” [scene 63]
- Turns violent when Pilate suggests releasing the innocent Jesus. “The resulting CLAMOR is so violent that PILATE IS SERIOUSLY INTIMIDATED. [scene 63]
- Is eventually silenced by the “smug and arrogant” Caiaphas, who cries “May his blood be upon us, then, and upon our children.” Pandemonium erupts. When the crowd sees the cross, ‘the CROWD’S BLOODTHIRST redoubles.’ [scene 65]
- It “breaks into murmurs, then shouts and then a more GENERAL CACAPHONY of HOT, PRIMITIVE NOISES, FILLED WITH ANIMAL ANTICIPATION” when the thief Gesmas sneers at Jesus. [scene 66]
- Lets out a DEAFENING CHEER when it sees Jesus MOMENTARILY CRUSHed by the weight of the cross. Then Roman Guards “holding the crowd back have a difficult time restraining the IMPATIENT, PREDATORY BLOODTHIRST of the people. [scene 66]
- Is “galvanized” by the scuffle between Roman soldiers protecting Mary and other soldiers. “They are on the VERGE of BREAKING THROUGH the line of ROMAN SOLDIERS when the ROMANS fall into LOCKSTEP and suddenly vent their own CONTEMPT by turning VIOLENTLY against the jeering crowd. [scene 71]
- IS “A NOISY DEBAUCH FOR THE MOST PART, FUELED BY CRUELTY AND THE ANTICIPATION OF PAINFUL TORMENT AND DEATH.” [scene 74C]
- Laughs sadistically in a CACAPHONY of shouts as the cross crashes to the ground; [scene 89]; later, it greets Caiaphas’ taunt with “derisive laughter.” [scene 92]

## Appendix 4

### The Script's Presentation of Pilate and Caiaphas

- In scene 54, “the crowd is PAYING NO ATTENTION TO PILATE” when he lifts his arms to demand attention. In scene 65, “the MOB BELOW is paying NO ATTENTION TO HIM.” Pilate “signals Caiaphas for quiet.” In both instances Caiaphas exclaims “SILENCE!” and “the noise immediately quiets down” [scene 54]. In scene 65, Pilate has to catch Caiaphas’ eye a second time before he will act to control the mob. “SLOWLY, drawing attention to HIS power, CAIAPHAS raises his hands over his head. SHOUTS of ‘QUIET!’ ‘SILENCE!’ The MOB quiets down. CAIAPHAS looks up. Smug. Arrogant.” This emotion echoes scene 63 when “CAIAPHAS and ANNAS and the other members of the SANHEDRIN who are present stand separate from the mob, exulting in their sense of power.”
- Pilate’s depiction has its ironic moments, but they intensify the responsibility of Jewish figures. When Jesus is first brought to him, Pilate asks the Sanhedrin, “Do you always half-kill your prisoners before they are even judged? [Scene 41]” In the same scene, when Caiaphas speaks the words of John 6:53 (which he does not do in John’s Gospel), Pilate retorts, “You must all be very eager to attain eternal life ... judging by the way you thirst for this body and his blood.” The gospels contain neither of these barbs.
- Pilate tells his wife in scene 50, “If I don’t condemn this man, I KNOW Caiaphas will start a rebellion.”
- Caiaphas first appears in Scene 3, described as “dressed SUMPTUOUSLY” and in “the RICHEST ROBES,” just before paying Judas to betray Jesus. When in Scene 22, Judas comes to his home, Caiaphas is “dressed in rich, impressive ceremonial robes.” Later, Judas will throw his blood money at Caiaphas, but they bounce off his “opulent robes” [scene 36]. Caiaphas then makes a show of lifting these “opulent robes” over the money on the ground, but he eyes an elder “meaningfully” who collects up the scattered coins after Caiaphas exits.
- When a bruised and battered Jesus is presented to the Caiaphas and Annas in scene 31, “ANNAS pretends to look surprised at the sight of Him, and exchanges ironic smiles with CAIAPHAS and others.” Later, “CAIAPHAS is filled with secret pleasure” when Nicodemus and other protestors leave the proceedings.
- As Jesus is being escorted from his encounter with Herod [scene 48]:

ANNAS: All we can do is bring him back to Pilate. We cannot condemn him.

CAIAPHAS: Not officially, no...

ANNAS takes this in, scans the faces around them. All of them turn to watch JESUS as he is DRAGGED from the hall. ANNAS turns to a particularly large, BRUTISH MAN among the Temple GUARDS. Their eyes meet, ever so briefly. ANNAS nods. The large GUARD walks toward the GUARDS who are marching Jesus out, mutters a few words to them. Electricity among the conspirators. Fire of hatred.

This cuts to exterior steps near the Temple: “JESUS’ ankles are tied with ropes. He is trying to defend himself while the guards drag him down the steps. His head, covered in a bag, repeatedly smashes against a stone” [scene 49].

- When Jesus is scourged, Annas “is MESMERIZED by a DISPLAY ... the TORTURERS are now putting on, who, ONE AFTER ANOTHER, select their favorite FLOGGING INSTRUMENT [scene 54]. As Jesus is reduced to a bloody mass, Caiaphas’ eyes are “shiny with breathless excitement. ANNAS, beside him ... cannot look, his face TWITCHING” [scene 57].
- Throughout the exchanges between Pilate and the crowd, it is Caiaphas who controls the action. Repeatedly, he shouts out an answer to Pilate and the “mob” simply parrots his words with ever increasing force.
- After Pilate, drawing on Mt 27:24, washes his hands and declares that he is innocent of Jesus’ blood, it is Caiaphas, not the people, who says triumphantly “May his blood be upon us, then, and upon our children.”
- When Jesus is crucified, Caiaphas and Annas and others of the Sanhedrin ride up on donkeys [scene 77] that had earlier been covered with “colorful wool-saddles” [scene 66]. Their wealth and status is thus reiterated.

## 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.

- **Second Vatican Council, *Nostra Aetate* (1965), 4.**

Even though the Jewish authorities and those who followed their lead pressed for the death of Christ, neither all Jews indiscriminately at that time, nor Jews today, can be charged with the crimes committed during his passion. It is true that the church is the new people of God, yet the Jews should not be spoken of as rejected or accursed as if this followed from Holy Scripture. Consequently, all must take care, lest in catechizing or in preaching the word of God, they teach anything which is not in accord with the truth of the Gospel message or the spirit of Christ. . . . The church always held and continues to hold that Christ out of infinite love freely underwent suffering and death because of the sins of all, so that all might attain salvation. It is the duty of the church, therefore, in its preaching to proclaim the cross of Christ as the sign of God's universal love and the source of all grace.

- **Pontifical Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, *Guidelines and Suggestions for Implementing the Conciliar Declaration Nostra Aetate, no. 4* (1974), II.**

With respect to liturgical readings, care will be taken to see that homilies based on them will not distort their meaning, especially when it is a question of passages which seem to show the Jewish people as such in an unfavorable light. Efforts will be made so to instruct the Christian people that they will understand the true interpretation of all the texts and their meaning for the contemporary believer.

Commissions entrusted with the task of liturgical translation will pay particular attention to the way in which they express those phrases and passages which Christians, if not well informed, might misunderstand because of prejudice. . . . [T]here should be an overriding preoccupation to bring out explicitly the meaning of a text, while taking scriptural studies into account. (Thus the formula "the Jews," in St. John, sometimes according to the context means "the leaders of the Jews," or "the adversaries of Jesus," terms which express better thought of the evangelist and avoid appearing to arraign the Jewish people as such. Another example is the use of the words "pharisee" and "pharisaism" which have taken on a largely pejorative meaning.)

- **Pontifical Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, *Notes on the Correct Way to Present Jews and Judaism in Preaching and Teaching in the Roman Catholic Church* (1985).**

The urgency and importance of precise, objective and rigorously accurate teaching on Judaism for our faithful follows too from the danger of anti-Semitism which is always ready to reappear under different guises. The question is not merely to uproot from among the faithful the remains of anti-Semitism still to be found here and there, but much rather to arouse in them, through educational work, an exact knowledge of the wholly unique "bond" (*Nostra Aetate*, no. 4) which joins us as a Church to the Jews and to Judaism. [8]

It is noteworthy too that the Pharisees are not mentioned in accounts of the Passion. Gamaliel (Acts 5:34-39) defends the apostles in a meeting of the Sanhedrin. An exclusively negative picture of the Pharisees is likely to be inaccurate and unjust. If in the Gospels . . . there are all sorts of unfavorable references to the Pharisees, they should be seen against the background of a complex and diversified movement. [19]

The Gospels are the outcome of long and complicated editorial work. The dogmatic constitution *Dei Verbum*, following the Pontifical Biblical Commission's Instruction *Sancta Mater Ecclesia*, distinguished three stages . . . . Hence, it cannot be ruled out that some references hostile or less than favorable to the Jews have their historical context in conflicts between the nascent Church and the Jewish community. Certain controversies reflect Christian-Jewish relations long after the time of Jesus. To establish this is of capital importance if we wish to bring out the meaning of certain Gospel texts for the Christians of today. All this should be taken into account when preparing catechesis and homilies for the last weeks of Lent and Holy Week. [21,A]



- **Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* (1988), IV,A,3.**

Particular attention is necessary, according to the spirit of the Second Vatican Council (*Nostra Aetate*, 4), to avoid absolutely any actualization [contemporary application] of certain texts of the New Testament which could provoke or reinforce unfavorable attitudes to the Jewish people. The tragic events of the past must, on the contrary, impel all to keep unceasingly in mind that, according to the New Testament, the Jews remain "beloved" of God, "since the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable" (Rom. 11:28-29).

- **Bishops' Committee for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, *God's Mercy Endures Forever: Guidelines on the Presentation of Jews and Judaism in Catholic Preaching* (1988).**

Another misunderstanding rejected by the Second Vatican Council was the notion of collective guilt, which charged the Jewish people *as a whole* with responsibility for Jesus' death. From the theory of collective guilt, it followed for some that Jewish suffering over the ages reflected divine retribution on the Jews for an alleged "deicide." While both rabbinic Judaism and early Christianity saw in the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in A.D. 70 a sense of divine punishment (see Lk 19:42-44), the theory of collective guilt went well beyond Jesus' poignant expression of his love as a Jew for Jerusalem and the destruction it would face at the hands of Imperial Rome. Collective guilt implied that because "the Jews" had rejected Jesus, God had rejected them. With direct reference to Luke 19:44, the Second Vatican Council reminded Catholics that "nevertheless, now as before, God holds the Jews most dear for the sake of their fathers; he does not repent of the gifts he makes or of the calls he issues," and established as an overriding hermeneutical principle for homilists dealing with such passages that "the Jews should not be represented as rejected by God or accursed, as if this followed from Holy Scripture" (*Nostra Aetate*, no. 4; cf. 1985 *Notes*, VI:33). [7]

Because of the tragic history of the "Christ-killer" charge as providing a rallying cry for anti-Semites over the centuries, a strong and careful homiletic stance is necessary to combat its lingering effects today. Homilists and catechists should seek to provide a proper context for the proclamation of the passion narratives. [21]

It is necessary to remember that the passion narratives do not offer eyewitness accounts or a modern transcript of historical events. Rather, the events have had their meaning focused, as it were, through the four theological "lenses" of the gospels. By comparing what is shared and what distinguishes the various gospel accounts from each other, the homilist can discern the core from the particular optics of each. One can then better see the significant theological differences between the passion narratives. These differences also are part of the inspired Word of God. [23]

Certain historical essentials are shared by all four accounts: a growing hostility against Jesus on the part of some Jewish religious leaders (note that the Synoptic gospels do not mention the Pharisees as being involved in the events leading to Jesus' death, but only the "chief priests, scribes, and elders"); the Last Supper with the disciples; betrayal by Judas; arrest outside the city (an action conducted covertly by the Roman and Temple authorities because of Jesus' popularity among his fellow Jews); interrogation before a high priest (not necessarily a Sanhedrin trial); formal condemnation by Pontius Pilate (cf. the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds, which mention *only* Pilate, even though some Jews were involved); crucifixion by Roman soldiers; affixing the title "King of the Jews" on the cross; death; burial; and resurrection. Many other elements, such as the crowds shouting "His blood be on us and on our children" in Matthew, or the generic use of the term "the Jews" in John, are unique to a given author and must be understood within the context of that author's overall theological scheme. Often, these unique elements reflect the perceived needs and emphases of the author's particular community at the end of the first century, *after* the split between Jews and Christians was well underway. [24]

Christian reflection on the passion should lead to a deep sense of the need for reconciliation with the Jewish community today. [25]

- **Bishops' Committee for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, *Criteria for the Evaluation of Dramatizations of the Passion* (1988).**

The greatest caution is advised in all cases where "it is a question of passages that seem to show the Jewish people as such in an unfavorable light" (*Guidelines* II). A general principle might, therefore, be suggested that if one cannot show beyond reasonable doubt that the particular gospel element selected or paraphrased will not be offensive or have the potential for negative influence on the audience for whom the presentation is intended, that element cannot, in good conscience, be used. [C,1,d]

[T]he central criterion for judgment must be what the [1974 Vatican] *Guidelines* called "an overriding preoccupation to bring out explicitly the *meaning* of the [gospel] text while taking scriptural studies into account" (II, emphasis added). Anything less than this "overriding preoccupation" to avoid caricaturing the Jewish people, which history has all too frequently shown us, will result almost inevitably in a violation of the basic hermeneutic principle of the [Second Vatican] Council in this regard: "the Jews should not be presented as rejected or accursed by God as if this followed from Sacred Scripture" (*Nostra Aetate*) [A,4].

Jews should not be portrayed as avaricious (e.g., in Temple money-changer scenes); blood thirsty (e.g., in certain depiction's of Jesus' appearances before the Temple priesthood or before Pilate); or implacable enemies of Christ (e.g., by changing the small "crowd" at the governor's palace into a teeming mob). Such depictions, with their obvious "collective guilt" implications, eliminate those parts of the gospels that show that the secrecy surrounding Jesus' "trial" was motivated by the large following he had in Jerusalem and that the Jewish populace, far from wishing his death, would have opposed it had they known and, in fact, mourned his death by Roman execution (cf. Lk 23:27). [B,3,d]

Those constructing a single narrative from the versions of the events in the four gospels are immediately aware that the texts differ in many details. To take just two examples, the famous phrase, "His Blood be upon us and on our children," exists only in the Matthean text (Mt 27:24-25), while the question of whether or not there was a full Sanhedrin trial is given widely differing interpretations in each of the gospel narratives. John, for example, has no Sanhedrin trial scene as such, but only a questioning before the two chief priests at dawn (18:19). Also in John, it is a Roman cohort, merely accompanied by Temple guards, that arrests Jesus (Jn 18:3, 12). How is one to choose between the differing versions?

First, it must be understood that the gospel authors did not intend to write "history" in our modern sense, but rather "sacred history" (i.e., offering "the honest truth about Jesus") (*Notes* IV, 29 A) in light of revelation. To attempt to utilize the four passion narratives literally by picking one passage from one gospel and the next from another gospel, and so forth, is to risk violating the integrity of the texts themselves, just as, for example, it violates the sense of Genesis 1 to reduce the magnificence of its vision of the Creation to a scientific theorem.

A clear and precise hermeneutic and a guiding artistic vision sensitive to historical fact and to the best biblical scholarship are obviously necessary. Just as obviously, it is not sufficient for the producers of passion dramatizations to respond to responsible criticism simply by appealing to the notion that "it's in the Bible." One must account for one's selections.

In the above instances, for example, one could take from John's gospel the phrase "the Jews" and mix it with Matthew 27:24-25, clearly implying a "blood guilt" on all Jews of all times in violation of *Nostra Aetate's* dictum that "what happened in his passion cannot be blamed on all the Jews then living without distinction nor upon the Jews of today." Hence, if the Matthean phrase is to be used (not here recommended), great care would have to be taken throughout the presentation to ensure that such an interpretation does not prevail. Likewise, the historical and biblical questions surrounding the notion that there was a formal Sanhedrin trial argue for extreme caution and, perhaps, even abandoning the device. As a dramatic tool, it can too often lead to misunderstanding. [C,1,a-c]

*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 hundreds of Jews crucified without proper trial under Roman law, and that in the year 36 Pilate was recalled to Rome to give an account. Luke, similarly, mentions "the Galileans whose blood Pilate mingled with their sacrifices" in the Temple (Lk 13:1-4), thus corroborating the contemporary secular accounts of the unusual cruelty of Pilate's administration. John, as mentioned above, is at pains to show that Jesus' arrest and trial were essentially at Roman hands. Finally, the gospels agree that Jesus' "crime," in Roman eyes, was that of political sedition - - crucifixion being the Roman form of punishment for such charges. The threat to Roman rule is implicit in the charge: "King of the Jews," nailed to the cross at Pilate's order (Mt 27:37; Mk 15:26; Lk 23:38; Jn 19:19). Matthew 27:38 and Mark 15:27 identify the "criminals" crucified with Jesus on that day as "insurgents." There is, then, room for more than one dramatic style of portraying the character of Pilate while still being faithful to the biblical record. Again, it is suggested here that the hermeneutical insight of *Nostra Aetate* and the use of the best available biblical scholarship cannot be ignored in the creative process and provide the most prudent and secure criterion for contemporary dramatic reconstructions. [C,2,b]

The full texts of these and numerous other church documents can be found on the website of the Center for Christian-Jewish Learning at Boston College at

[www.bc.edu/cjlearning](http://www.bc.edu/cjlearning)