

**ENDTIME ISSUES NEWSLETTER No. 118:**  
**“The Co-Redemptive Role of Mary in *The Passion*”**  
**Samuele Bacchiocchi, Ph. D.,**  
**Retired Professor of Theology and Church History,**  
**Andrews University**

Warm greetings from London, England, where the weather has been unusually hot during the past few days. Last Sabbath, August 7, 2004, the temperature was over 90 degrees. Our British churches are not equipped with air-conditioning, because heat is seldom a problem in England.

It was quite an ordeal for me to speak for a total of 6 hours last Sabbath in an oppressive heat. What gave me the encouragement to hold on, was the presence of so many fellow believers willing to suffer with me through the heat. The Walthamstow SDA Church and its fellowship hall were packed, with some people standing outside. On Sabbath afternoon we had a marathon session lasting four hours from 5:00 p. m. to 9:00 p.m. During the whole session hardly a soul left. Truly, I can say that our people were willing to put up with a lot of discomfort to enrich their understanding and experience of Biblical truths. Such encouraging responses constantly inspire me to attempt greater things for the Lord.

**Excerpts from the Manuscript on THE PASSION**

Beginning with this newsletter, I plan post some excerpts from the manuscript I am currently working on *The Passion of Christ in Scripture and History*. This research project is proving to be an enlightening experience for me. Frankly, I must admit that I was not fully aware of the subtle and deceptive way in which fundamental Catholic teachings have been embedded in Passion Plays like Mel Gibson’s movie on *The Passion of the Christ* (henceforth *The Passion*).

In many ways the dramatization of Christ’s suffering and death through Passion Plays and movies, have promoted fundamental Catholic beliefs and piety, more effectively than the teaching ministry of the Catholic church. Unfortunately, these beliefs grossly misrepresents the Biblical view of God’s nature, the meaning of Christ’s suffering and death, the role of Mary in our salvation, the use of images in worship, and the

responsibility of the Jews for Christ's death. Each of these beliefs is examined at length in the forthcoming book *The Passion of Christ in Scripture and History*. This newsletter focuses on the co-redemptive role of Mary as portrayed in Passion Plays.

### **The Growing Acceptance of Mary Among Evangelicals**

The growing acceptance of Mary among evangelicals as a partner with Christ in our salvation, may prove to be one of the most significant Catholic evangelistic achievements of our time. In an interview with *Christianity Today*, Mel Gibson himself expressed his amazement at the way evangelical Christians are accepting what he calls Mary's "tremendous *co-redemptrix* and *mediatrix*" role.<sup>1</sup> He said: "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.*"<sup>2</sup> The influence of *The Passion* in leading many Evangelicals to accept Mary as a partner with Christ in our salvation, may prove to be, as stated earlier, one of the greatest Catholic evangelistic achievements of our times.

The problem is that the average viewer of *The Passion* responds to the movie emotionally, without stopping to consider if the ideas embedded in the movie are biblically sound. The fact that numerous "brand-name" preachers and church leaders have praised the movie as an accurate portrayal of the Gospels' accounts of Christ's final hours, gives to uninformed viewers reasons to believe that what they see in the movie is what is written in the Gospels. Even in our Adventist Church, some well-known pastors have preached a series of sermon on *The Passion*, praising the movie as a trustworthy source of the details of Christ's suffering and death, comparable to the Gospels and *The Desire of Ages*. You can find a discussion in ENTIME ISSUES NEWSLETTER No. 113.

### **Newly Released Scholarly Analysis of *The Passion***

The truth is substantially different. Some scholars have taken time to compare the script of *The Passion* with the Gospels and they have found that 95 per cent of the content of the movie is foreign to the Gospels. A major scholarly analysis of the movie has been prepared by an international team of ten leading Bible scholars belonging to different denomina-

tions.. The symposium is entitled, *Jesus and Mel Gibson's "The Passion of the Christ." The Film, the Gospels and the Claims of History*. The book is scheduled to be released by the end of August 2004, in conjunction with the DVD released of *The Passion*. The publisher, *The Continuum*, has graciously made available to me an advanced "proof" copy, which is facilitating my own research.

The objective of the symposium is not to discredit *The Passion*, but rather to help readers appreciate the movie more fully and critically. One of the contributors, John Dominic Crossan, Professor Emeritus of Religious Studies at DePaul University, concludes his survey saying: "In this film, about 5 percent comes from the Gospels—that is the general outline and the sequence of events; about 80 per cent comes from Emmerich [the German mystic who wrote the fiction *The Dolorous Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ*]—that is, the details and the characters that carry the best and the worst of the non-Gospel additions and expansions; and about 15 per cent from Gibson—that is, everything that escalates the violence above that already prevalent in Emmerich."<sup>3</sup>

### **The Goal of My Forthcoming Book**

The goal of my forthcoming book on *The Passion of Christ in Scripture and History* is different from that of the newly released symposium. My aim is not merely to compare the content of the movie with the Gospels' accounts of the Passion, but primarily to help the average Christian to better understand the historical origin and theological developments of major Catholic heresies embedded in Passion Plays such as Gibson's movie. The intent is to help truth-seekers better understand the theological import of major deceptive Catholic heresies embedded in Passion Plays—heresies that have been blindly accepted by millions of sincere Christians throughout the centuries.

This newsletter is excerpted from chapter 2 of my manuscript on *The Passion of Christ in Scripture and History*. The chapter is entitled "The Theology of the Passion Plays." Its objective is to examine from a biblical perspective six deceptive Catholic teachings embedded in Passion Play. One of them is the prominent role of Mary as partner with Christ in His suffering and intercession. Mel Gibson, who is deeply devoted to Mary, does a superlative job in portraying the *Passion of Christ* through

the eyes of the *Passion of Mary*. The result is that many Evangelical Christians, including some Adventists who have written to me, are reconsidering favorably the co-redemptive role of Mary.

In the forthcoming newsletters I plan to publish other segments of the manuscript. My goal is twofold. First, to share in advance some timely studies designed to help truth-seekers to better understand major deceptive teachings of our times. Second, to benefit from the constructive criticism that some of you readers will offer me. What I am looking for is not the correction of misspellings or of sentence construction. A dozen of competent linguists have graciously offered to edit my manuscript. Within few days I hope to mail to them the first two chapters of the manuscript, consisting of about 100 pages. Rather, I am interested in your reaction to the content of the essays. If you find some concepts unclear or unreasonable, be sure to share your concerns with me. I will give thoughtful consideration to your comments.

### **A CLARIFICATION ABOUT 3ABN**

An article entitled “THE STORY OF LINDA SHELTON,” written by Johann Thorvaldsson, a retired Adventist church leader who served until recently as the 3ABN liaison for Europe, has been circulating with my name attached at the end. This has created the false impression that I have authored the article or at least I vouch for its accuracy.

The truth of the matter is that I have not written the article, nor have I vouched for its accuracy. Apparently what happened is that a person who received from me some documents related to the 3ABN controversy, decided without my permission to send out Pastor Thorvaldsson’s article with my name attached to it at the end. This has given the false impression that the article is circulating with my blessing. This is not the case. I have not endorsed any of the 3ABN documents that have been sent me.

The charges and countercharges that I have read and heard from relatives of the Shelton, have made me aware of the complexity of the case. In any marriage break up, both partners share part of the blame. Thus, any attempt to portray Danny as a saint and Linda as a sinner, or vice versa, hardly does justice to the complexity of the case. Personally, I feel it would be helpful to appoint an independent commission to evaluate what has

happened and issue a report that could help to clear the air of unfounded stories and accusations. But, I doubt that this will ever happen, because Danny has always resisted any external investigation by Adventist church leaders of his 3ABN operation.

### **WILL 3ABN AIR MY NEWLY RECORDED SEMINARS?**

Many of you have been asking me: When will 3ABN air your newly recorded PowerPoint messages on the SABBATH and ADVENT? At this point I do not know for sure, but I received a hopeful message on July 28, 2004 from Mollie Steenson, the 3ABN Operational Manager. She indicates that the 5 DVD disks, containing 10 one-hour PowerPoint messages recorded by a television crew last January, are being evaluated for both production and pastoral quality. I expect to hear from Sister Steenson within the next few weeks. I will be sure to report the decision in our newsletter as soon as I receive it.

It may be helpful to clarify that airing messages on 3ABN does not ensure a worldwide outreach, as it is often claimed. The reason is that outside the USA, very few Adventists have installed the dish needed to receive the HOPE CHANNEL and 3ABN programs. Last Sabbath I was privileged to meet in London the man who is largely responsible for installing dishes in England. While driving in his van, he told me that about 300 dishes that have been installed in Adventist homes and churches in England.

During my three visits to England this year alone, well over 500 sets of DVD albums have been distributed. Our members are enjoying and sharing these Sabbath/Advent messages with their friends. If you or your church has not yet received the VIDEO or DVD album with these 10 timely SABBATH/ADVENT messages, feel free to contact us by email or by phone (269-978-6878 or 269-471-2915). We will be sure to mail you a VIDEO or DVD album immediately.

### **NEW ANNOUNCEMENTS POLICY**

At the suggestion of several subscribers, I have decided to eliminate the lengthy announcements of my weekend seminars and the special offer of HITACHI projectors and of my publications/recordings. These

announcements take several pages that clutter the newsletters. Instead, from now I will post in the newsletters ONLY A LIST of the announcements and of the special offers. The details will be posted at my website <http://www.biblicalperspectives.com>. Each item can be accessed immediately by clicking on the appropriate button displayed in the opening page of my website. Those who cannot surf the web, are welcomed to contact me and I will email them the details of each announcement.

## **TWO OUTSTANDING ADVENTIST PRODUCTIONS**

Until now I have declined to announce the outstanding research or recordings of other Adventist scholars, because my newsletters are already lengthy. But now, by adopting the new method of listing briefly the announcements in the newsletter and then giving the details at my website, it is possible for me to alert you to some outstanding recordings or publications that can be of great blessings to you. Rest assured that I will only announce what I consider a brilliant and timely Adventist production.

### **The Great Controversy Experience of the Apostolic Church**

In this newsletter I wish to alert you about two outstanding recent Adventist productions. The first, is an interactive multimedia CD-ROM of the unfolding of the Great Controversy during the first century of Christianity. The producer is Gerard Damsteegt, Ph. D., Professor of Church History at our Andrews University Theological Seminary. With the help of graphic experts who worked with him during the past 8 years and the generous contribution of supporters who believed in this project, Damsteegt has produced a CD-ROM that will thrill your soul and enrich your mind.

When Damsteegt came to demonstrate this interactive CD-ROM at my house, I could not believe what they have accomplished and compressed in one CD-ROM. The simplest way for me to describe it, is to compare it to 100 documentaries on the Apostolic Church all compressed in the same CD-ROM. You are guided through a virtual tour of the early church and constantly given the opportunity to watch what you want to see or read what you want to read. For example, you can click on the life of Jesus, His Passion, Paul's Mission, the Destruction of Jerusalem, the Persecution of the Church, and immediately a documentary begins

with original sounds, authentic texts, live narration, and real pictures. Contrary to Gibson's fiction, all what you see and hear is a factual presentation of the biblical and historical sources.

Had it not been for the generous contribution of supporters who believed in this project, the cost of this interactive CD-ROM would be at least \$200.00. Instead, you can order your artistically designed album for only \$65.00, airmailing expenses included. Read the rest of the story at my website: <http://www.biblicalperspectives.com/Promotions/TheGreatControversyExp.htm>. If you have a problem ordering this marvellous CD-ROM through my website, just email us your order or call us at (269) 978-6878 or (269) 471-2915. We will be glad to take your order and AIRMAIL you immediately this fantastic multimedia interactive CD-ROM.

### **The Best New SDA Commentary on the Book of Revelation**

The second outstanding Adventist production I wish to bring to your attention, is the newly released commentary on the Book of Revelation, which is widely regarded as the commentary ever produced by the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Adventist Bible teachers have adopted this book for college and seminary classes. The title of the book is *Revelation of Jesus Christ. Commentary on the Book of Revelation*. The author is Ranko Stefanovic, Ph. D, currently serving as Professor of New Testament at Andrews University. The publisher is Andrews University Press.

Prof. Stefanovic spent two years producing this popular version of his doctoral dissertation presented with distinction at the Andrews University Theological Seminary. If you wish to understand the cryptic message of the Book of Revelation, you will be most grateful to Prof. Stefanovic for providing a wealth of information that unlock the meaning of problematic passages. This verse-by-verse commentary will help you capture the overall message of Revelation and its relevance for our endtime generation.

This timely and imposing book has been published in hard cover by Andrews University Press and consists of 654 pages. It weighs almost 4 pounds. The price is \$48.00, including mailing to US destinations or

\$52.00 for overseas mailing. You can read the full story at my website: <http://www.biblicalperspectives.com/Promotions/RevelationofJesusChrist.htm>. If you have a problem ordering the book through my website, just email us your order or call us at (269) 978-6878 or (269) 471-2915. We will be glad to take your order and mail you the book immediately.

## **LIST OF ANNOUNCEMENTS AND SPECIAL OFFERS**

### **Upcoming Weekend Seminars**

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

### **How to Schedule a Weekend Seminar at your Church in 2005**

If your church or school is interested to invite me to present one of my popular PowerPoint seminars in 2005, feel free to email me your inquiry. I will be glad to email you all the information with the open dates for 2005. The 2004 calendar is heavily booked. The email gives you the outline of the three PowerPoint Seminars on the SABBATH, SECOND ADVENT, and CHRISTIAN LIFESTYLE , as well as sample color fliers I will supply to your church.. The cost is very reasonable, consisting primarily of the refund of the airfare and motel accommodations.

### **Hitachi Projectors at a Bargain Price**

If you or your church are looking for a outstanding LCD projector to project, especially the forthcoming NET 2004, you will be pleased to learn about the special price HITACHI is offering to our Adventist churches and schools on their line of projectors. Over 400 Adventist churches and schools have already purchased HITACHI projectors.

I especially recommend the newly released 2700 LUMENS HITACHI CP-S420, which is designed for churches or auditoriums with

large amount of light. I am using this new projector every weekend with great satisfaction. Its special price is only \$2195.00, instead of the factory suggested retail price of \$7,495.00.

On July 31, 2004, I demonstrated this new 2700 LUMENS HITACHI CP-S420 at the Kingsview Village SDA Church in Toronto, Canada, where I presented my SABBATH Seminar. The church recently bought a SANYO 4100 lumens for over \$6000.00. When we compared the picture of the SANYO with that of the new 2700 LUMENS HITACHI, Pastor Allan Chichester and his audio-video technician, could not believe that the HITACHI's picture was so much sharper and brighter. He deeply regretted having spent thousands of extra dollars for an inferior projector.

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

### **SPECIAL ONE-TIME OFFER on CD-ROMS and DVD/VIDEO RECORDINGS**

We are extending the **SPECIAL ONE TIME OFFER** on the **TWO CD-ROM** and the **FIVE DVD DISKS** that contain all my research (over 7000 pages), all my PowerPoint Lectures, and the live recordings of my SABBATH/ADVENT seminars, taped by a TV crew last January. **The special offer is ONLY \$100.00, postage paid, instead of the regular price of \$350.00.** Read the details at my website: <http://www.biblicalpherspectives.com/Promotions/SPECIALPACKAGEOFFER.htm>. If you have a problem ordering the package through my website, just email us your order or call us at (269) 978-6878 or (269) 471-2915. We will be glad to take your order by phone and mail you the package immediately.

### **Bed and Breakfast in London, England**

Are you planning to travel to London, England? If you do, you will be pleased to learn about a most gracious Adventist couple who offer the

best accommodation and breakfast I have ever enjoyed. For details, visit my website at <http://www.biblicalperspectives.com/Promotions/BED&BREAKFAST.htm>. You see also the picture of the house and of the room.

**“The Co-Redemptive Role of Mary in *The Passion*”  
Samuele Bacchiocchi, Ph. D.,  
Retired Professor of Theology and Church History,  
Andrews University**

In Gibson’s movie *The Passion of the Christ* is largely seen through the *Passion of Mary*. From Gethsemane to Golgotha, the sufferings of Christ are revealed through the anguish of Mary. She sustains her Son and shares in His suffering throughout the ordeal. How can we explain the prominent co-redemptive role of Mary throughout Gibson’s movie, when in the Passion narratives of the Gospels, Mary is mentioned only once, when Jesus entrusts her to care of John, saying: “Woman, behold your son” and to John, “Behold your mother” ( John 19:26-27).

The explanation is to be found, not in Gibson’s fertile imagination, but in the medieval Catholic notion of God as a harsh, punitive Being who demands full satisfaction for mankind’s sins. This misconception of God promoted not only the devotion to Christ’s suffering, but also the veneration of Mary as a partner in the suffering of her Son for our salvation.

**Catholic View of Mary’s Unique Role**

Catholics believe that Mary is in a unique position to intercede for sinners, because she is the human mother of the Son of God who suffered with Him for our salvation. Being a compassionate, loving mother, Mary can soften the heart of God, moving Him to forgive penitent sinners. This belief has inspired the popular devotion to the “Sacred Heart of Mary.”

Many devout Catholics display in their homes the image of Mary with her radiant heart blown out and constantly illuminated by a candle-like bulb. It is this Catholic belief in the co-redemptive role of Mary that motivated Gibson to highlight her role throughout the film, sustaining her Son from Gethsemane to Golgotha. During the procession to the Cross, Mary is present at each of the falls of Jesus, and at one point she goes

directly to Him and encourages Him saying: “I am here.”

As a reaction to the Catholic exaltation of Mary, Protestants have tended to downplay the role of Mary, reducing her to an ordinary woman who fulfilled her motherly role in bringing Jesus into the world and training Him for His mission. We must acknowledge that Protestants have failed to give due credit to Mary, because she was an extraordinary woman of profound faith and transparent sincerity who “found favor with God” (Luke 1:30). She must have done a superb job in bringing up her Son in a dysfunctional family with several children of her older husband.

### **Catholic Honor Mary’s Role in Our Salvation**

The problem is that Catholics venerate Mary, not only because she is the human mother of Jesus, but also because they believe that she played a vital role in our salvation. This belief is expressed in the prayers offered to Mary, especially during the Masses celebrated at Lent. The *Collection of Masses of the Blessed Virgin Mary* explains that “The Mass in celebration of Christ’s saving passion [at Lent] also honors the part played by the Blessed Virgin in achieving our salvation. When Mary became the mother of Christ ‘by the power of the Holy Spirit,’ she became by a further gift of divine love ‘a partner in His passion,’ a mother suffering with Him. The prayers of the Mass recall the plan of salvation, by which God joined the suffering of the mother with the suffering of her Son, and decreed that ‘the new Eve should stand by the cross of the new Adam.’”<sup>4</sup>

Catholics believe that Mary participates in our Redemption by undoing the disobedience of Eve. “As Eve indirectly contributed to the Fall of Man, so Mary indirectly contributes to our Redemption. As Eve gave Adam the instrument of the Fall (the forbidden fruit) so Mary gave Jesus the instrument of the Redemption (His Body). . . . Because a woman was involved (indirectly) in the Fall, God wanted the sins of the first man and woman to be reversed, not by a Man alone, but by a woman as well. . . . Mary participates in our redemption in three ways: she obeyed God and so brought the Redeemer into the world, she united her sufferings to His on the Cross, and she participates in the distribution of the graces of salvation.”<sup>5</sup> Being a traditional Catholic, Mel Gibson is true to the Catholic belief that Mary is a co-redeemer and proudly calls her “a tremendous *co-redemptrix* and *mediatrix*.”<sup>6</sup> With great subtlety Gibson portrays Mary as a participant in Christ’s suffering and death for our salvation.

## Two Unbiblical Assumptions

The Catholic belief in the present participation of Mary in our redemption as mediator and intercessor, is based on two unbiblical assumptions. The first, already mentioned, is that she suffered with her Son throughout the ordeal of the Cross. Consequently, as a partner in Christ's suffering, Mary is supposed to have the right to share in Christ's intercession and glorification in heaven.

The second unbiblical Catholic assumption is that Mary ascended to heaven body and soul, so that she might be close to her Son and intercede before the Father on behalf of the church. The new *Catechism of the Catholic Church* explicitly teaches that "The Most Blessed Virgin Mary, when the course of her earthly life was completed, was taken up body and soul into the glory of heaven, where she already shares in the glory of her Son's Resurrection, anticipating the resurrection of all members of His Body."<sup>7</sup> The *Catechism* continues saying: "We believe that the Holy Mother of God, the new Eve, Mother of the Church, continues in heaven to exercise her maternal role on behalf of the members of Christ."<sup>8</sup>

## The Prominent Role of Mary in *The Passion*

The fundamental Catholic belief that Mary participates in our Redemption, because she shared in the earthly suffering of her Son at the Cross, is fully reflected in her portrayal in Passion Plays, especially in Gibson's movie on *The Passion*.

In *The Passion* Mary lends vital support to her Son throughout His trial, scourging, and crucifixion. In accordance to Catholic belief, had she been absent, Christ would not have been able to offer Himself as the sacrifice for mankind. This heresy is taught especially by mystic writers like Ann Catherine Emmerich who presents Mary as co-redemptrix, that is, co-redeemer. She writes: "The Blessed Virgin was ever united to her Divine Son by interior spiritual communications; she was, therefore, fully aware of all that happened to him— she suffered with him, and joined in his continual prayer for his murderers."<sup>9</sup>

Mary's role as co-redeemer comes out clear and strong throughout the movie. An ordinary mother would have screamed at seeing her son

brutalized. But Mary, though heartbroken, understands and consents to the ordeal her Son must undergo. “So be it,” she says at one point, and again “It has begun.” At the foot of the Cross, she says to her Son: “Let me die with you.”

While in the Gospels’ narrative of the Passion, Mary appears only once in the Gospel of John, when Jesus on the Cross pointing to John says to His mother: “Woman, behold your son!” (John 19:26), in Gibson’s movie Mary is present every step of the way, acting as His coach from Gethsemane to Golgotha. The message is that Jesus made it to the Hill, because Mother Mary infused some mystical power through the meeting of their eyes, whenever Christ had no strength to go on. In keeping with traditional Catholic theology, we witness Christ’s suffering and death in Gibson’s movie through Mary’s eyes.

### **Was Mary the Spiritual Mother of the Disciples?**

Mary is dressed like a Medieval nun, rather than a first-century Jewish woman. She is present in the Garden to comfort her Son. She meets Peter on the streets after his denial of Christ. Peter in distress looks Mary in the face and falls on his knees, calling Mary “Mother.” John also calls Mary “Mother.” The assumption is that Mary was already accepted by the disciples as their spiritual Mother. Such an appellation is foreign to the Bible, but reflects the traditional Catholic veneration of Mary, as “Mother of God,”—not just Christ’s human mother.

Peter confesses his sin to Mary and asks for her forgiveness. Mary is ready to absolve Peter for his sin, but he jumps up and says, “No, I am not worthy.” The source is *The Dolorous Passion* where Peter after his denial, rushes out to Mary, exclaiming in a dejected tone: “O, Mother, speak not to me—thy Son is suffering more than words can express: speak not to me! They have condemned Him to death, and I have denied him three times.”<sup>10</sup> The Catholic view of the intercessory role of Mary is loud and clear.

### **Mary and Claudia**

The prominent role of Mary is evident also during the scourging, when Pilate's wife, Claudia, gives to Mary fine cloths which she later used to mop up Jesus' blood. Again the source is not the Bible, but *The Dolorous Passion* which says: "I saw Claudia Procles, the wife of Pilate, send some large pieces of linen to the Mother of God. I know not whether she thought that Jesus would be set free, and that his Mother would then require linen to dress his wounds, or whether this compassionate lady was aware of the use which would be made of her present. . . . I soon after saw Mary and Magdalen approach the pillar where Jesus had been scourged; . . . they knelt down on the ground near the pillar, and wiped up the sacred blood with the linen which Claudia Procles had sent."<sup>11</sup> This scene is vividly portrayed in Gibson's movie, but it is totally absent in the Gospels. Incidentally, during the Middle Ages, the cloths stained with Jesus' blood became holy relics venerated by devout Catholics.

Mary appeals to Pilate's wife, Claudia, urging her to pressure the Roman soldiers to protect her Son against the angry Jewish crowd. Claudia aligns herself with Mary by influencing her husband on behalf of Christ. But Pilate's efforts are too little and too late. Again, the interaction between Mary and Claudia is foreign to the Bible, deriving instead from *The Dolorous Passion*.

Mary's prominent role can be seen also in Christ's journey along the *Via Dolorosa* on the way to Golgotha, known in Catholic tradition as the 14 "Stations of the Cross." When the Roman soldiers inquire of her identity, they are told "She is the mother of the Galilean. Do not impede her." During this journey, Christ stops and falls several times because he has no strength left to go on. At those points, Mary is always near Christ and acts as His comforter and coach. Through their eye contact, Mary infuses mystical power on her Son. At one point she reassures her Son, saying: "I am here."

### **Mary and Jesus at the Cross**

When Jesus hangs on the Cross with His lacerated body covered with blood, Mary embraces His bloody feet and her face is splattered with blood. What a powerful Catholic message in showing Mary as a co-partner in our redemption! The message is clear: both Jesus and Mary have paid the price of our redemption.

After Jesus expires on the Cross, Mary, the mother of Jesus, Mary Magdalene, and John, are shown taking Jesus' body down from the Cross. Even more telling is the picture of Mary cradling Christ's bloody body and holding His head in her arms, in the same position as Michelangelo's *Pietà*. This unbiblical picture has a powerful message. It shows in a most appealing way the Catholic belief that Mary participated in Christ's sacrifice by offering her Son for our salvation.

The involvement of Mary in taking down Christ's body and preparing it for burial, is clearly contradicted by the Gospels where Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus took down Christ's body from the Cross and "bound it in linen cloths with spices, as is the burial custom of the Jews" (John 19:40). There is no allusion to Mary or to the other devout women handling the body of Jesus at the Cross.

The exalted role of Mary in Passion Plays is a pure fabrication of Catholic mystics, who have been eager to glorify the intercessory role of Mary at the expense of the centrality of Christ's atoning sacrifice. Today the exaltation of Mary as a partner with Christ in our redemption is effectively promoted also by the Marian messages coming from apparition sites which have received the Catholic Church's approval. For example, one Marian message from Our Lady of Akita to Sister Agnes Sasagawa, says: "I alone am able still to save you from the calamities which approach. Those who place their confidence in me will be saved."<sup>12</sup> A similar message from Mary to St. Bridget of Sweden, says: "I boldly assert that His suffering became my suffering, because His heart was mine. And just as Adam and Eve sold the world for an apple, so in a certain sense my Son and I redeemed the world with one heart."<sup>13</sup>

### **Intercession is an Exclusive Prerogative of Christ**

Historically, Protestants have strongly rejected the Catholic belief in Mary as a partner with Christ in our redemption. They have condemned such belief as a fundamental Catholic heresy that obscures the centrality and uniqueness of Christ's sacrifice and mediation. By attributing to Mary and the saints an intercessory ministry in heaven on behalf of penitent sinners on earth, the Catholic Church has developed an idolatrous religion that offers salvation through a variety of persons. The result is that many devout Catholics offer more prayers to Mary and the saints than to the

Father or the Son. A major reason is their misconception of God as a stern and punitive Being difficult to approach directly by sinners. By contrast, Mary, as the “Mother of God” and co-redeemer, stands in a favorable position to intercede before God in heaven on behalf of penitent sinners on earth.

The Bible is abundantly clear that *only* Christ ascended to heaven to minister in the heavenly sanctuary as our intercessor and mediator. “When Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God” (Heb 10:12). Contrary to the Old Testament levitical ministry where “priests were many in number” (Heb 7:23), Christ is the *only* priest and intercessor in heaven. “Consequently he is able for all time to save those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them” (Heb 7:25). The Bible consistently presents Christ as the sole High Priest, Mediator, and Intercessor, ministering in the heavenly sanctuary on our behalf (Eph 4:5; 1 John 2:1; Heb 4:14, 16; 7:23-25; 9:24; 10:11-12).

There are no allusions in the Bible to Mary or the saints, interceding in heaven on behalf of sinners on earth. Intercession is an exclusive prerogative of Christ, our Savior. To elevate Mary to a co-redemptive role with Christ, means to attribute divine qualities and attributes to a mortal human being. The ultimate result is the widespread idolatrous worship of Mary—a worship condemned by the first and second commandments, which enjoin us to worship God exclusively: “You shall have no other gods before me” (Ex 20:3).

### **Growing Acceptance of Mary as Co-Redeemer**

There are indications that an increasing number of Protestants are embracing the Catholic belief in the co-redemptive role of Mary. Several factors are contributing to this development. For example, feminist theologians are promoting Mary as the female counterpart of God, thus, attributing to her divine attributes and prerogatives.

Another factor is the reemergence of the Goddess within the New Age Movement and Eastern Religions. In her book *The Goddess Re-Awakening*, Beatrice Bruteau notes that “the presence of the Goddess

herself has never departed from her holy place in our consciousness, and now, as we enter what many feel to be a ‘new age,’ we sense that the Goddess is somehow making her way back to us. But in just what guise is so far unclear.”<sup>14</sup>

A more immediate contributing factor to the acceptance of Mary as co-redeemer, is the subtle way in which Mary participates in the suffering of her Son throughout *The Passion*. In many ways Gibson’s movie portrays the *Passion of Mary* as much as the *Passion of Christ*. In an interview with *Christianity Today*, Gibson himself expressed his amazement that evangelical Christians are most receptive to what he calls Mary’s “tremendous *co-redemptrix* and *mediatrix*” role.<sup>15</sup> He said: “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*.”<sup>16</sup> The influence of *The Passion* in leading many Evangelicals to accept Mary as a co-redeemer, may prove to be one of the greatest Catholic evangelistic accomplishments of our times.

### **Unbiblical Role of Mary**

The Catholic exaltation of Mary as a partner with her Son in our redemption is clearly contradicted by the Scripture. In the Gospels’ accounts of the Passion, Mary appears only once at the Cross when Christ entrusts her to the care of John, saying: “Woman, behold your son!” (John 19:26). Such an impersonal address hardly supports the mystical interaction between Jesus and Mary present in Passion Plays. Such an interaction obscures the relationship between the Father and the Son, making salvation more an accomplishment of mother Mary and her Son than of than of the Father and the Son.

In the Gospels the interaction is between the Father and the Son, not between Mary and her Son: “My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt” (Matt 26:39). And again. “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Matt 27:46). These pronouncements reveal the distinctive relationship that exists between Christ and the Father. Christ came, not to work together with His mother for our salvation, but to do the will of his Father: “Lo, I have come

to do thy will” (Heb 10:9). The Cross reveals, not Mary offering her Son for our salvation, but the Father willing through His Son to become flesh and suffer the punishment of our sins in order to redeem us without compromising His own character.

The exaltation of Mary as co-redeemer of mankind, mediating Christ’s grace, is effectively promoted by Passion Plays and Marian messages. These are posing a serious threat to Evangelical Christianity. Many well-meaning Evangelicals are enthusiastically embracing the Catholic view of Mary’s role in our salvation, without realizing the magnitude of the threat that such teaching poses to the centrality and uniqueness of Christ’s sacrifice and mediation.

The problem we are facing today is that many people are largely biblically *unliterate* and image-oriented, with the entertainment media functionally operating as their biblical authority. In other words, many Christians are influenced far more by what they see in the movies, than by what they read in their Bible. The reason is that people spend far more time watching movies than reading their Bible. A religious movie like *The Passion* will soon become for many people their living Bible.

A lady sent me an email saying that she was grateful that Gibson’s movie brought out the “facts” of the Passion missed by the Gospels. She felt that the Gospels largely ignore the contribution that Mary made to our salvation, She was glad that “*The Passion* has set the record straight.” Is this sound reasoning? Do we test the accuracy of *The Passion* by the Gospels, or do we rewrite the Gospels in accordance to a fictional religious movie? It is important to remember that God has chosen to reveal His will for our lives, not through drama and plays, but through the Written Word.

## CONCLUSION

The few references to Mary in the Gospels indicate that God chose her to bring His Son into the world, because she was an extraordinary godly woman. She must have loved her Son deeply and devoted herself unreservedly to His upbringing. She must have faced most difficult challenges in training her Son in a home made up of an older husband with step brothers and sisters. Her dedication to her Son is evident in the fact that she

followed Him all the way to the Cross, feeling in her heart the brutal suffering of her Son, like only a mother can feel.

Mary was a vessel used by God and she deserves our respect. But to exalt Mary as a partner with Christ in our salvation, interceding in heaven on our behalf, means to make a mortal human being into an immortal divine being. It means to make the human mother of Jesus in the divine “Mother of God,” as the Catholics worship her. The result is the worship of Mary which the Bible clearly condemns as idolatry. “You shall have no other gods before me” (Ex 20:3).

### ENDNOTES

1. “Mel, Mary, and Mothers,” *Christianity Today* (March 2004), p. 25.
2. Ibid.
3. John Dominic Crossan, “Hymn to a Savage God,” in *Jesus and Mel Gibson’s The Passion of the Christ. The Film, the Gospels and the Claims of History*, Eds. Kathleen F. Corley and Robert L. Webb, (New York, 2004), p. 12.
4. *Excerpts from the Introductory commentary to the Mass, Collection of Masses of the Blessed Virgin Mary*, Volume 1, (Sacramentary, Catholic Book Publishing Co., 1992), p. 65.
5. “Is Mary the ‘Coredemptrix’?” <http://home.nyc.rr.com/mysticalrose/marian14.html>
6. “Mel, Mary, and Mothers,” *Christianity Today* (March 2004), p. 25.
7. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (New York, 1997), p. 276, paragraph 974.
8. Ibid., p. 276, paragraph 975.

9. Anne Catherine Emmerich, *The Dolorous Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ*, p. 172.
10. *The Dolorous Passion* p. 174.
11. *The Dolorous Passion*, p. 211.
12. Teiji Yasuda, O.S.V., English version by John M. Haffert, *Akita: The Tears and Message of Mary*, (Asbury, N. J. 1989), p. 78.
13. Thomas Petrisko, *Call of the Ages*, (Santa Barbara, CA, 1995), p. 247.
14. Beatrice Bruteau, compiled by Shirley Nicholson, *The Goddess Re-Awakening* (Wheaton, IL, 1994), p. 68.
15. "Mel, Mary, and Mothers," *Christianity Today* (March 2004), p. 25.
16. Ibid.