

fact, four years after Tracy's death Garson Kanin published a book called *Tracy and Hepburn* that was a best-seller. Many of the obituaries referred to the affair reverentially. Canted though it is, that reverence was, in America, a low bow.

I saw Hepburn on stage only once, in a musical about Coco Chanel. Many, many times in my life I have regretted after a performance that the theater is ephemeral, but this was not one of those times. Fortunately, most of her adorers know her only through her pictures. Her obituaries demonstrated a special blessing of film: it allowed Hepburn to soar over her shortcomings by the power of her self.

Descend now to mortals. **THE CUCKOO** is an allegorical drama, written and directed by Alexander Rogozhkin, a Russian, set in northern Finland in September 1944, a short time before Finland withdrew from its alliance with Hitler. A Finnish soldier is shackled to a rock by his fellows as punishment for lapses in martial spirit. Not far away, a Soviet captain is under punishment for his laxness about the war, and escapes in an accident. Both men, who have been enemies,

are sheltered by a young Lapp widow who has a rough hut nearby on a place where she raises deer.

The three people speak three languages. (The Lapp language is called Sami.) There are difficulties of communication. These do not stop each of the men from eventually sleeping with the woman, at her invitation: still, misunderstandings and near murder do mar matters.

The message of the picture, which might have been made by the late tractarian Stanley Kramer had he been Russian, is clearer than clear. If all the people on earth could only understand one another, there would be no war. (The small matter of civil war is not touched.) And if we all only lived as simply as the Lapp woman does and nursed one another back to health with home remedies, paradise would be closer. The ending of the picture, ten or so years later, confirms the lesson in a way that I won't reveal, not to preserve the surprise but to avoid the risible.

Rogozhkin's hard, hands-on directing technique and the physicality of all three actors are—or could be—impressive, but they are swamped here in a sea of ideological mush. ■

Paula Fredriksen

Mad Mel

The Gospel according to Gibson.

MEL GIBSON'S NEWEST historical drama, on the death of Jesus Christ, is not anti-Semitic. So complete is his commitment to historical authenticity that he has eschewed subtitles, and will tell his story entirely in its original ancient languages, Aramaic and Latin. Gibson bankrolled the entirety of his forthcoming film, and he co-wrote the script; but the Holy Spirit directed it. "The Holy Ghost was working through me on this film," Gibson has recounted when asked about *The Passion*. "I was just directing traffic." Unfortunately, a group of Catholic and Jewish scholars, alert to Gibson's effort, engaged the services of a mole, ... illegally obtained a copy of the script,

and then began to pressure Gibson to revise his story to conform to their own ideas about history and theology. Gibson's lawyers quashed their attempted extortion, however. The scholars withdrew their criticisms. And Mel's movie, in various private screenings, has already begun to move hearts and minds.

All the sentences above are culled from recent articles in assorted media—*The Wall Street Journal*, *The New York Times*, *NewsMax.com*, *Zenit*, Religion News Service, the *New York Daily News*, Australia's *Sun-Herald*. Some of the statements are true. Gibson did co-write the script. His company, Icon, did produce it. His attorney did accuse critics of attempting extortion. And at least one viewer at a private screening

in June, moved to tears and prayer, has called the film "a miracle." Whether the Holy Ghost helped out during the shoot I cannot say. All the other statements, I do know, are false.

I began worrying about Gibson's movie back in March, when *The Wall Street Journal* and *The New York Times* ran their stories. The piece in the *Journal* rhapsodized about Gibson's religious faith as well as about his ardent commitment to his vision: a graphic exploration of the suffering, the torture, and the death of Jesus. The script would draw not only on the Gospels, the article reported, but also on visions of Christ's Passion received and written up by two seventeenth-century nuns. Gibson, the *Journal* revealed, was struggling to recapture historical reality both visually (the gore, the pain) and aurally. Ancient languages, no subtitles: this was "a point of honor for Mr. Gibson." His reason was simple. "This is what was spoken at the time," he explained.

But something did not add up. To depict a first-century event by drawing on visionary writings composed almost two millennia later makes no sense at all: one might as well try to reconstruct ancient armor by peering at Bruegel. And while Aramaic was indeed the daily language of ancient Jews in Galilee and Judea, Latin would scarcely have figured at all. When the Jewish high priest and the Roman prefect spoke to each other, they would have used Greek, which was the English of antiquity. And Pilate's troops, employees of Rome, were not "Romans." They were Greek-speaking local gentiles on the imperial payroll. Gibson's pious evocations of historicity rang more than a little hollow. How much homework had he actually done?

Then *The New York Times Magazine* published a profile of Hutton Gibson, the actor's father. He is what modern Catholics politely term a "traditionalist." Hutton Gibson considers the current papacy to be illegitimate. Vatican II—the Roman Church council in 1965 that, inter alia, changed liturgical language from Latin to spoken vernaculars, and expressed as a theological point of principle that all Jews everywhere could not be held culpable for the death

Paula Fredriksen is the Aurelio Professor of Scripture at Boston University and the author of JESUS OF NAZARETH, KING OF THE JEWS (Vintage), a historical study of the last twelve hours of Jesus's life.

of Jesus—he dismisses as a coup pulled off by Freemasons and Jews. He is also given to idiosyncrasy about the Holocaust (he believes that it never happened) and about September 11 (he believes that Al Qaeda was not involved).

The father's views, the article properly noted, cannot simply be imputed to the son. But the *Times* also noted that the son has aired his own contempt for the Vatican, and has generously financed and very visibly endorsed assorted "traditionalist" endeavors. And now he is committed to making this graphically violent film called *The Passion*. In light of the historical connection between the charge of Christ-killing and Christian anti-Jewish violence, might the film upset Jews? "It may," Gibson conceded. "It's not meant to. It's meant just to tell the truth."

YOU DO NOT HAVE TO BE JEWISH to find anti-Semitism alarming and morally repulsive. Plenty of non-Jews—Christian, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist—repudiate anti-Semitism and condemn it. But it is worth remembering that Catholics have an additional reason to combat anti-Semitism. It is that popes and bishops, in plenum councils, have issued official ("magisterial") teachings against it. Anti-Semitism violates magisterial instruction touching on biblical interpretation, on the theological significance of Christ's sacrifice, and on Catholic-Jewish relations.

And so, within two weeks of the appearance of these articles, Icon was contacted by Eugene Fisher, associate director of the Secretariat for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs for the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB). Fisher's counterpart at the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), Eugene Korn, also weighed in. They assembled an ad hoc group of professors—four Catholics, two Jews, all scholars of the New Testament—to review the script together with Fisher and Korn, who themselves hold doctorates. Shortly thereafter, at their invitation, I also joined the group.

On March 25, the day before they invited me on board, Fisher and Korn exchanged communications with one William Fulco, S.J., who teaches in the department of classics and archaeology at Loyola Marymount University, a Jesuit institution in Los Angeles. He had served as Gibson's librettist, translating the script from English into Aramaic and Latin. His intimacy with the script

was perhaps the reason that he assumed, or was assigned, his role; for as long as the dialogue lasted, Fulco was the main contact on the Icon side.

Fisher and Korn had faxed Fulco two documents on criteria for evaluating dramatizations of Jesus's Passion, one issued by the USCCB in 1988, the second produced jointly by the USCCB and the ADL in 2001. In response, Fulco thanked them, and assured both men that the script was devoid of any hint of anti-Jewishness. In fact, he claimed, it was "totally in accord with the [USCCB/ADL] documents." Fulco's struggles with the translation, he says in this e-mail, had engraved the script in his memory. ("I know [it] almost backwards.") Shooting had concluded, Fulco said, only the prior week. Fulco then added two points of information relevant to future events—that he was "preparing accurate subtitles" (what had happened to Gibson's "point of honor"?), and that "the film follows the script quite faithfully." (Since the reporter from *The Wall Street Journal* had mentioned seeing "a first look at a rough cut of the film," it must have been substantially assembled before March 7.)

A few weeks later, on April 14, Fisher wrote to the group of scholars and to another USCCB officer: "I have just received the good news that we will receive the script for our analysis and comment within the next couple of days." The scholars had to promise confidentiality: we could not circulate the script outside of our group, "though of course your comments can be public." On April 17, Fisher informed Fulco that he had received the script and had sent copies out to the scholars. We received them and read them over Easter weekend.

The whole group heard again from Fisher on April 25. "Gibson called me last night," Fisher began. "He had with him McEveety [another Icon producer] and Fulco." Gibson said that he wanted Fisher to convey to the scholars that he does not share his father's views, that some of his best friends are Jewish, that he is sensitive to anti-Semitism and opposed to it. "As an Irish Catholic Australian," wrote Fisher in his e-mail, Gibson "knows more than a bit about religious and social prejudice and [he] relates to Jews as fellow sufferers from it.... He's open to what we have to say, but still a bit cautious." At this point Fisher still thought that we could work with Gibson to try to improve his film.

We already knew that Gibson's ef-

forts to be "as truthful as possible" (his own words in the *Times*) would be frustrated by the best sources that he had to draw on, namely, the Gospels themselves. Mark, Matthew, Luke, and John, whose texts were composed in Greek between 70 C.E. and 100 C.E., differ significantly on matters of fact. In Mark, Jesus's last meal is a Passover seder; in John, Jesus is dead before the seder begins. Mark and Matthew feature two night "trials" before a full Jewish court, and a dramatic charge of "blasphemy" from the high priest. Luke has only a single trial, early in the morning, and no high priest. John lacks this Jewish trial scene entirely. The release of Barabbas is a "Roman custom" in Mark, a "Jewish custom" in John. Between the four evangelists, Jesus speaks three different last lines from the cross. And the resurrection stories vary even more.

The evangelists wrote some forty to seventy years after Jesus's execution. Their literary problems are compounded by historical ones: it is difficult to reconstruct, from their stories, why Jesus was crucified at all. If the priests in Jerusalem had wanted him dead, Jesus could have been privately murdered or killed offstage. If the priests had wanted him killed but were constrained from arranging this themselves, they could have asked Pilate to do the job. If the Roman prefect had simply been doing a favor for the priests, he could easily have arranged Jesus's death by any of the considerable means at his disposal (assassination, murder in prison, and so on).

The fact that Jesus was publicly executed by the method of crucifixion can only mean that Rome wanted him dead: Rome alone had the sovereign authority to crucify. Moreover, the point of a public execution, as opposed to a private murder, was to communicate a message. Crucifixion itself implies that Pilate was concerned about sedition. Jesus's death on the cross was Pilate's way of telling Jerusalem's Jews, who had gathered in the holy city for the paschal holiday, to desist from any thought of rebellion. The Gospel writers, each in his own way, introduce priestly initiative to apologize for Roman fiat, and the evidence suggests that the priests must have been somehow involved. But the historical fact behind the Passion narratives—Jesus's death on a cross—points to a primarily Roman agenda.

Moderns who wish to render artisti-

cally something of the Gospel stories have several options. Bach and Pasolini focused on single Gospels, thereby sparing themselves the chore of sorting through and deciding between their differing traditions. Kazantzakis and Scorsese chose instead to select, to blend, and to adapt themes from all the Gospels to create a modern story. But Gibson, by so vociferously insisting that he was committed both to the Gospel narratives and to "historical accuracy" (hence his much-trumpeted use of Aramaic and—oops—Latin), had put himself in an interesting bind.

THE SCRIPT, WHEN WE got it, shocked us. Nothing of Gibson's published remarks, or of Fulco's and Gibson's private assurances, had prepared us for what we saw. Each scholar, independent of the others, wrote his or her own comments on the document. We then boiled them down, bulleted our points, and made the whole discussion easy to digest. The first section of our report explained the historical connection between passion plays and the slaughter of European Jews, the dress rehearsals for the Shoah. Then we summarized our responses to the script. We pinpointed its historical errors and—again, since Gibson has so trumpeted his own Catholicism—its deviations from magisterial principles of biblical interpretation. We concluded with general recommendations for certain changes in the script. Four short appendices—two historical, two directly script-related—traversed this same terrain from different directions. A final appendix provided excerpts from official Catholic teaching.

Receiving criticism is never easy. As teachers and as scholars, who regularly give and get criticism, we knew this. We also knew that we were asking Gibson to revise his script substantially. We knew that we were working against his enthusiasm, his utter lack of knowledge, and his investment of time and money. We pinned our hopes on his avowed interest in historicity, on his evident willingness to hear what we had to say, and on his decency. In retrospect, we also functioned with a naïveté that is peculiar to educa-

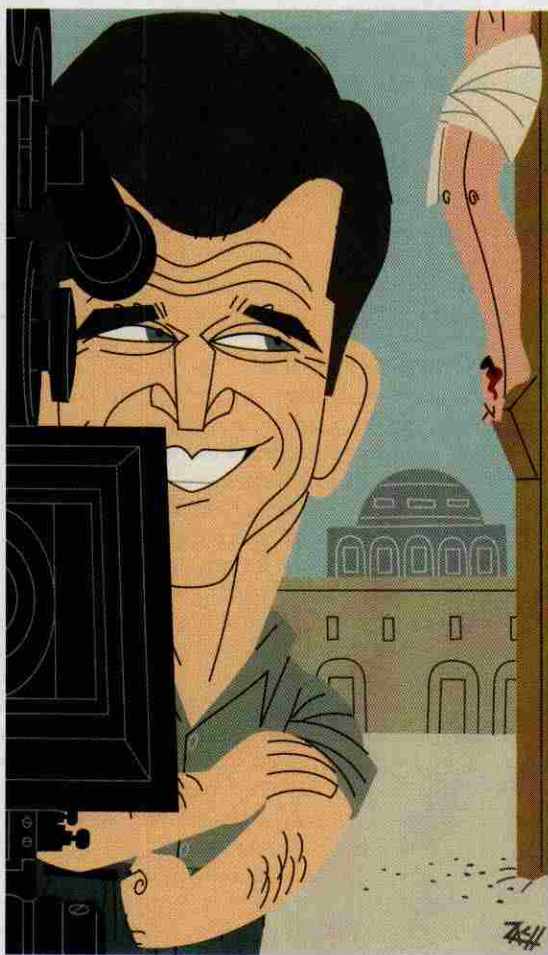
tors: the belief that, once an error is made plain, a person will prefer the truth.

Fulco knew by April 27 what the substance of our response had been: Fisher had already communicated privately with him. By May 2, we had our eighteen-page report assembled. Fisher and Korn co-wrote the cover letter on USCCB stationery, and sent the report to Icon by May 5. On May 9, members of the group received our copies. We

Theological Seminary in New York, an adviser on ecumenical affairs to the USCCB, a member of the Catholic Biblical Association, and a tireless worker in the area of Catholic-Jewish relations. She knows anti-Semitic drivel when she sees it.) At the same time, another member of the scholars group, Father John Pawlikowski, O.S.M., professor of social ethics at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago, mentioned an unhappy encounter that a friend of his—like Fulco, a professor at Loyola Marymount—had had with other Jesuits following Loyola's commencement ceremonies on May 11. On that day, Gibson had received an honorary doctorate. These Jesuits informed Pawlikowski's colleague that "Father Fulco has written a beautiful script; how could we possibly attack him? How could anyone criticize the story of the Passion? They were all aware of our report, so Fulco is obviously spreading the word."

We were surprised: we had understood that, for the time being, our report, like Gibson's script, was meant to be kept between us and Icon. "They"—Fulco, Gibson, and company—"are simply going to discredit us," Pawlikowski concluded. On May 16, the truth of his words, and the reasons for Icon's silence, became clear. On that date, Fisher, Korn, the ADL, and the USCCB received a letter from Gibson's attorney. Dated May 9, written within days of Icon's receipt of our report, the letter had sat for a week while we waited for their response, and Gibson collected his degree, and Fulco avoided Korn, and the Icon executives and Fulco conferred.

"As you are fully aware, you are in possession of property stolen from Icon, namely a draft of the screenplay for the Picture," the letter began. "At no time did Mr. Gibson authorize the release of this material to you or to any other third party for dissemination to you." The lawyering went on for another page: "You have admitted that you came into possession of this stolen property by means that are illegal." "You are now attempting to force my clients to alter the screenplay to the Picture to suit your own religious views." Our side was threatening to discredit the film, and to



Mel Gibson by Zach Trenholm for *The New Republic*

waited. Icon was silent. When Korn phoned Fulco on May 12 to get his sense of the report, Fulco declined to share his views. He did mention that he, Gibson, and other Icon executives were scheduled to meet the following day. More silence.

Meanwhile, disturbances began to accrue. After a story about Gibson's movie ran in the *Los Angeles Times*, one of the group's members, Mary Boys, S.N.J.M., received "three vicious letters filled with personal attacks and anti-Semitic drivel." (Boys is a chaired professor at Union

intimidate Gibson. ("This act is itself illegal—it is called extortion.") All scripts were to be returned by 5:00 p.m. on May 13. (Poor organization, since this letter was faxed three days after its own deadline.) Court orders, lawsuits, reserved rights and remedies, and all sorts of terrible consequences might and could and would follow. Very truly yours, et cetera.

"Gibson, Fulco and McEveety were all on the phone with me well before," Fisher wrote to me on May 20. "They knew we had the script, as they had known for some time, and did not ask for it back." Icon's new claim also made nonsense of the earlier condition of confidentiality to which we had assented before seeing the screenplay: who else would have required that? No matter. Lawyers were in the saddle; reason was dying.

THEN, ON MAY 30, THE SPIN cycle formally kicked in. Zenit, a Catholic news service based in Rome, picked up an earlier article in the *Denver Catholic Register* written by Archbishop Charles Chaput in defense of the film. Chaput evidently felt that "a film of sincere faith" should not be charged with potentially stirring up anti-Semitism. "Between a decent man and his critics," Chaput continued, "I'll choose the decent man every time—until the evidence shows otherwise." (Icon arranged for a subtitled version of Gibson's film to be shown at a private screening in Colorado Springs the last week of June. I await with interest the archbishop's response.)

Zenit embedded Chaput's remarks, surprisingly, within a larger and detailed review of our supposedly confidential report. It repeated our criticisms (without, of course, addressing them), and then quoted what it deemed our "central complaint," namely, that Gibson's "graphic movie" could "re-awaken the very anti-Semitic attitudes that we have devoted our careers to combating." Zenit prefaced its report of our concern by singling out for mention one member of our group, Amy Jill Levine. The reporter had gone to her website and indignantly pulled one of her self-descriptions: "a Yankee Jewish feminist." (Lest Levine's remark be misunderstood, let the record state that she was born in New Bedford, Massachusetts and spends her summers grieving for the Red Sox.) Levine is a chaired professor of New Testament studies at Vanderbilt's

divinity school and the author of prize-winning studies on early Judaism, Christian origins, and the Gospel of Matthew. Still, nothing in particular distinguished her from the rest of us except, perhaps, the humor of her self-description and her recognizably Jewish name.

SOMEONE AT ICON HAD CLEARLY leaked our report to Zenit—"a pre-emptive, ad hominem attack," Fisher observed to the USCCB, "to discredit the scholarship of the group." Icon's lawyers focused on the Bishops Conference. Mark Chopko, general counsel for the USCCB, finally sent a formal letter to the scholars on June 9 in which he repeated Icon's assertion that we had obtained the screenplay without permission. Chopko also relayed what has since become an official trope of the Icon spin: "The draft of the screenplay is not what the final film will contain."

These two assertions—that the script was purloined, and that the final film is quite different from the script—have been endlessly repeated in numerous follow-up stories in Reuters, the *New York Daily News*, and elsewhere. *News-Max.com* even had thechutzpah to insinuate that the scholars had leaked their own "supposedly confidential report" to the news media. And disinformation likewise abounds. The Religion News Service claimed that the "group of scholars... has withdrawn its criticisms." We have not. We stand by them. The report in Reuters suggested that the film's potential anti-Semitism concerned the Jews, while the violation of church teaching concerned the Catholics. This, too, is false. The Catholics feel even greater urgency about its anti-Semitism, because the ethical issue for them is so clear. Jews are the objects of anti-Semitism, but Catholics and other Christians, inspired by Gibson's movie, could well become its agents. (Indeed, on the evidence of the anti-Semitic hate mail that we have all received since being named as critics of Gibson's screenplay, this response is already in play.)

Gibson has continued to speak earnestly of his film as "conforming" to the New Testament. Unless he ditched the script with which he was working as late as March, wrote an almost entirely new one, re-assembled his cast, re-shot his movie, and then edited it in time to be screened in June, this statement, too, must be false. Six pages of our report lay

out for him exactly those places where he not only misreads but actually contravenes material given in the Gospels. And his historical mistakes, no less profound, are spelled out for him there, too.

In light of Gibson's and Icon's contact with Fisher prior to receiving our report, their first assertion—that we were working with a stolen script—is at least disingenuous. Gibson himself may not have formally "authorized" our reviewing his screenplay. But he certainly knew what we were doing. He had cleared Fulco to function as the point man. And, through Fisher, he had been in contact with us. Also, the initial condition of confidentiality could only have come from his side. Icon did not decide that the script had been "stolen" until they learned of our response and did not like it.

The second assertion of Gibson's company—that the film, which of course we have not seen, does not follow the screenplay, which we have seen—also seems simply false. A rough cut already existed before March 7, when the *Journal's* reporter viewed it. Shortly thereafter, on March 25, Fulco—who is well positioned to know—stated plainly that "the film follows the script quite faithfully." And Gibson's and Icon's knowledge that we were reviewing the screenplay counts against their second claim also. Gibson had asked Fisher on April 24 to communicate on his behalf with our group. Why would he be so concerned with our evaluation if he knew that what we were evaluating bore so little resemblance to his actual film?

Finally, details of the film as reviewed by the insider-fan on June 26 conform exactly, alas, to what we had seen in the script. Satan inciting the executioners at their task; "a vicious riot of frenzied hatred between Romans and Jews with the Savior [en route to Golgotha] on the ground in the middle of it getting it from both sides"; the post-crucifixion Mary-and-Jesus *pietà*—no such scenes exist in the Gospels. But they are all in the screenplay that we saw.

That script—and, on the evidence, the film—presents neither a true rendition of the Gospel stories nor a historically accurate account of what could have happened in Jerusalem, on Passover, when Pilate was prefect and Caiaphas was high priest. Instead Gibson will apparently release what Christopher Noxon, in his article for the *Times*, had correctly described already in March: "a

big-budget dramatization of key points of traditionalist theology." The true historical framing of Gibson's script is neither early first-century Judea (where Jesus of Nazareth died) nor the late first-century Mediterranean diaspora (where the evangelists composed their Gospels). It is post-medieval Roman Catholic Europe. Fulco could have spared himself a lot of trouble and just put the entire script into Latin. Not pagan Roman Latin, but Christian Roman Latin. For *that* is the true language of Gibson's story.

What happens now? Chopko, the USCCB general counsel, formally notified Icon of the bishops' regrets "that this situation has occurred, and offer our apologies." On June 11, the USCCB issued a statement clarifying its official relationship to our report. The bishops knew what we were doing (Fisher, an officer for this group, had informed them), but the plenum group had not "established, authorized, reviewed, or approved the report written by its members." This is absolutely true. Fisher, together with Korn, had convened us. We worked as independent scholars, though four of us also have formal connections with the USCCB.

Those four of us have posted a review of these events on the Boston College website. We have also posted there an analysis of the mystical writings of Sister Anne Catherine Emmerich (1774–1824), one of the visionary nuns whose writings Gibson used for his script. Emmerich wrote in her diary that she had "seen" the high priest ordering the cross to be made in the courtyard of the Temple itself. The high priest's servants, in her visions, bribe Jerusalem's population to assemble in the Temple at night to demand Jesus's death; they even tip the Roman executioners. Emmerich's Pilate criticizes the high priests for their physical abuse of Jesus, but finally he consents to crucify him, because he fears that the high priest wants to start a revolt against Rome. And so on.

Emmerich was not writing history. She was having visions. But—as *The Wall Street Journal*, the film's unofficial website, and numerous news articles since have all mentioned—Gibson used Emmerich's fantasies for his supposedly "historical" script. Since the Boston College posting has brought this piece of the story forward, Paul Lauer, Icon's direc-

Wittgenstein's Screw

The calendar moves by degrees.

Someone's finger is pointing at the rain,
at gulls in gray dunes that float up
into their inverse likeness. There they hover
as torn up clouds over beaches drifting
with the tide, dancing with it, draping
themselves over so they seem unmoving.

Then I see a heron by the inlet.
He stands, one thing, unmoved, as if
cut out from whatever had stood there
before him, exactly filling his space
so nothing is left over, scissored out
of gray blue sky and cloud, gray blue water
so the longer you look the more he
disappears until at last what you thought
some sort of finality, some definitive shape,
is gone, and you look right through to sky
and water and beyond to gulls marking dunes
like punctuation until they too are released
into water and cloud, and the ripe rain is turning
and moving straight at you as if it is something,
and the sky moves on, turning like
Wittgenstein's screw that turns without moving
any part of the mechanism to which it is attached.

BRIAN SWANN

tor of marketing, has denied that Gibson used Emmerich's writings. But he had: the nun's lurid images figured prominently in the version of the screenplay that we read and that Gibson was concerned about as recently as April 24.

Icon's publicist, Alan Nierob, has spun the communications from the USCCB as if the bishops had recanted the project entirely. They have not. Both Chopko and the conference affirm the USCCB's commitment to reviewing the film. The conference's statement of June 11 closes by referring to the importance and the sensitivity of dramatizations of the Passion. It directs readers to its own published guidelines for such, "reminding Catholics that the correct presentation of the Gospel accounts of the Passion and death of Jesus Christ do not support anti-Semitism."

Monsignor Francis Maniscalco, the memo's author, concludes by naming further publications assembled by the bishops. These instruct the church on the Shoah, on Catholic remembrance of the Holocaust, and on Catholic preaching about Jews and Judaism. "The Conference," Maniscalco closes, "reserves its

right to review and comment on this and all other films." Hutton Gibson might disregard these men as the servants of Freemasons and Jews, but his son will doubtless be hearing from them again. I hope that they bring to their eventual review of this unfortunate film the full weight of their unique moral authority.

Steve McEveety, the Icon producer, has reiterated that Gibson's film "has not even been completed." The release date seems set for next spring. That still gives Gibson lots of time to work on it, and to address its most egregious aspects. Compelled by whatever combination of individual temperament and commercial self-interest to repudiate the scholars' report, he can still avail himself of it.

The prognosis does not look good. While he has continued to insist upon his personal piety and his commitment to historical truth-

telling, Gibson has just executed what looks like a very cynical marketing end-run. As *The Washington Times* reported on July 7, Gibson "is shopping his film to a more receptive audience: evangelical Christians, conservative Catholics, and Orthodox Jews." Orthodox Jews, I can say with authority, tend to know next to nothing about the Gospels (unless, of course, they are scholars of the field). Conservative Catholics are Gibson's set-point to begin with. But evangelical Christians, in my experience, know their Scriptures very, very well. Their biblical literacy may yet cause Icon's spinmeisters to stumble. I certainly hope so.

Anti-Semitism is not the problem in America that it is in the rest of the world. (The hateful e-mails that we have received have been balanced by others, from church leaders of inter-faith efforts across the country, expressing their support and their concern.) But I shudder to think how *The Passion* will play once its subtitles shift from English to Polish, or Spanish, or French, or Russian. When violence breaks out, Mel Gibson will have a much higher authority than professors and bishops to answer to. ■

