

Mel Gibson's gospel of salvation



MORE LETTERS

alone offers the saving touch of Jesus. From what I hear, Mr. Gibson's film presents this truth without any anti-Semitic touches and in spite of any alleged "erroneous reports."

Robert P. Cirre
West Meadows Drive
Rochester

Balance in second film panel sought

To the editor:

It was disappointing that as a sponsor of the discussion of "The Passion of the Christ," the *Catholic Courier* couldn't find a Catholic who could find just one positive thing to say about Mel Gibson's version of one of the most powerful events in Christianity. Granted, Mel Gibson is a traditional conservative Catholic and many non-Catholics might not realize the difference. Father Falcone's comments about the movie and personal attack on Mel Gibson went so far left, I was left wondering where is the middle ground — the truth? I hope part 2 of the discussion has a Catholic who will fairly represent the Catholicism many of us practice.

Janene Loughran
Monterey Parkway
Rochester

EDITOR'S NOTE: Like their March 11 counterparts, the Feb. 26 panelists were selected — before the film's

opening — based on their expertise in various fields, not based on predictions about how they would rate the film. However, we now know that at least one March 11 panelist, Jack Garner, has many positive things to say about the film. In fact, he gave it his highest rating (10) in his *Democrat and Chronicle* review.

Says panel was too 'PC'

To the editor:

In the March 4 issue of the *Catholic Courier*, I was not surprised to read the non-recommendation by the panel of religious regarding Mel Gibson's movie *The Passion of the Christ*. I doubted such a diverse, politically correct group would reach a favorable, objective consensus.

Having viewed the movie, I found it to be historically correct. There was no controversy. Sure, there were some artistic deviations, but the story line was biblically true. It's a visual story no book can emotionally capture.

Should people see it? Absolutely. For the believing Christian, it'll strengthen their faith. For the lapse and lukewarm, it'll open their eyes. For the nonbeliever, they'll witness the ultimate culmination of God's love. It's a reality worth seeing.

Stephen J. Fisher
Honeoye Falls # 6 Road
Honeoye Falls

By now many thousands of people have seen Mel Gibson's controversial film, "The Passion of the Christ." Opinions will undoubtedly range from "breath-takingly inspiring" to "jarringly violent" to "anti-Semitic" to "empty of hope" — referring to a depiction of the Passion without the redemptive climax and centerpiece, the Resurrection.

This week's column, written before the movie's release date, is not a review. Nor does it contain speculation about whether the film is likely to foment anti-Semitic feelings and behavior.

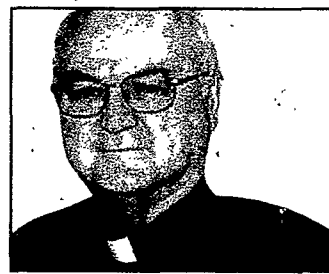
What is of interest is the irony of the film's enthusiastic reception by evangelical and fundamentalist Protestants and of the carefully designed efforts to recruit them as its most zealous promoters.

In an article in *The New Yorker* magazine ("The Jesus War: Mel Gibson's Obsession," 9/15/03), there is a theologically revealing exchange between Gibson and the author, Peter J. Boyer.

Mr. Boyer, a Protestant, asked whether Gibson's pre-Vatican II world-view would disqualify him (the author) from eternal salvation.

Gibson responded, "There is no salvation for those outside the church. I believe it."

He continued: "My wife is a saint. She's a much better person than I am. Honestly. She's, like, Episcopalian, Church of England. She prays, she believes in God, she knows Jesus, she be-



Father Richard McBrien

Essays in Theology

lieves in that stuff. And it's not fair if she doesn't make it, she's better than I am. But that is a pronouncement from the chair. I go with it."

Gibson believes that non-Catholics (Protestants and Anglicans, Orthodox and other separated Eastern Christians, Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, and on and on) cannot be saved.

It means those evangelical and fundamentalist Protestants, and their ministers, who have been flocking to the theaters to see and then rapturously praise this film.

It means the non-Catholic film critics, columnists and politicians who have been willing spear-carriers in the campaign to promote the film and defend it against the so-called liberal elite and the Jewish establishment (whomever they might be).

All of them are destined for hell, in the "gospel according to Gibson." He admits he is not happy about it and that it may be "unfair."

But it is a "pronouncement from the chair" — probably the medieval axiom, "Outside the church, no salvation," an axiom which offi-

cials of the church, even before Vatican II, have interpreted differently than Mr. Gibson does.

In 1949, the Holy Office, in response to a plea for help from Cardinal Cushing (then archbishop of Boston and under siege from the followers of Jesuit Father Leonard Feeney, who were pushing the medieval axiom to what they thought was its logical conclusion — just like Mel Gibson — made a distinction between members of the church "in reality" and members "by desire."

The Vatican insisted that those who belong "by desire" can also be saved, if they have good will and have not stubbornly refused to investigate the Catholic Church's claims to truth.

The Second Vatican Council's Decree on Ecumenism put it even more strongly. While non-Catholic Christians may not enjoy "full" communion with the Catholic Church, they do enjoy some "degree" of communion, connecting them spiritually with Christ's redemptive work.

Its Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, notes that salvation is available to non-Christians, without prejudice to the truth of the church's own faith.

A TV Guide ad terms Gibson as a "staunch" Catholic. "Staunch" indeed.

Father McBrien is a professor of theology at the University of Notre Dame.

The *Catholic Courier* provides space for readers to express opinions on all sides of the issues. We welcome original, signed letters about current issues affecting church life.

Although we cannot publish every letter we receive, we seek to provide a balanced representation of expressed opinions and a variety of reflections on life in the church. We will choose letters based on likely reader interest, timeliness and a sense of fair play. Our discerning readers may determine whether to agree or disagree with the opinions expressed.

Letters must not exceed 300 words. Anonymous letters and the use of pseudonyms are unacceptable. We reserve the right to edit letters for legal and other concerns. With respect to errors in submitted text, we will correct spelling only.

Mail letters to: *Catholic Courier*, P.O. Box 24379, Rochester, NY 14624 or e-mail to letters@catholiccourier.com. Please include your full name, phone number and complete address for verification.

Letters Policy