



in FOCUS

Equipping God's Workers With God's Word For God's Work



ON *The Passion of the Christ*

Jean Uayan

When [we] go to church it is to worship God and have fellowship with Him and with fellow believers. When we celebrate the Eucharist it is to remember what Jesus paid to secure our redemption and to enjoy His presence (Heb 10: 19-20) and live by His grace through the help of the Holy Spirit.

The controversial film, *The Passion¹ of the Christ* (2003), made by Mel Gibson, has generated passionate reactions from all sectors of society. Many of the reactions coming from the same camp (Roman Catholic/Evangelical/Jewish, etc.) are fair but mixed; some are outright prejudicial rejections.² The Vatican has not officially endorsed the film, although Pope John Paul II watched it and supposedly remarked, "It is as it was."³ However, the Zenit News Agency reported on 9 December 2003 that "members from the Vatican Secretariat of State, the Pontifical Council for Social Communications, and the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, the group that oversees Catholic doctrinal questions, expressed unanimous appreciation and approval of the film" after viewing a private screening of the film. This news agency interviewed Dominican Father Augustine di Noia,⁴ and he gave a favorable review of what he saw. What bothered me about his comments was his answer to the question "What struck you most about the film?" He answered: "Jim

Caviezel and Maia Morgenstern." The former plays Jesus and the latter, Mary. Concerning the latter, he made the statement:

Maia Morgenstern's Mary is equally powerful. It reminded me of something St. Anselm said in a sermon about the Blessed Mother: Without God's Son, nothing could exist; without Mary's Son, nothing could be redeemed. Watching Morgenstern's portrayal of Mary, you get the strong sense that Mary "lets go" of her Son so he can save us, and, joining in his suffering, becomes the Mother of all the redeemed.⁵

It is proper to understand this statement by going to the Roman Catholic resources: the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*⁶ (CCC), the *Catechism for Filipino Catholics*⁷ (CFC) supplemented by the conciliar and post conciliar documents of the Second Vatican

(Continued on page 2)

WELCOME TO THE MALESSA FAMILY

New Faculty Member

"How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!"

This old statement is the reason why we are here in the Philippines because we know that it is still true today. We—that is, Michael and Anke Malessa. We are missionaries with OMF International and left our home country, Germany, to come to the Philippines in August 2003. We both have studied theology at an evangelical seminary in Germany where we met for the first time. After our studies our ways

(Continued on page 3)

Council and the doctrinal works of McBrien⁸ and Ott⁹. This paper will investigate what the Roman Catholic Church teaches about the death of Christ and Mary's role in this sacrifice. A brief reference will be made to relevant passages from the different creeds and confessions of the Protestant church and Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*.¹⁰

The specific paragraphs dealing with the death of Christ are found in CCC Part One, Section Two, Chapter Two, Article 4, Paragraph 2, §595-623 (pp. 169-178). The profession of Jesus Christ, the Only Son of God, and His trial and crucifixion, are being dealt with in particular. Paragraph 2 is titled "Jesus Died Crucified"; a summary of this section is given in annotated outline form as follows:

1. The setting is the relationship of Jesus with the Law, the Temple and the Jews who did not recognize Him as God made man (Paragraph 1, § 574-94). Jesus did not abolish but fulfilled the Law. He predicted His death using the Temple as metaphor for His body, and became the center of divisive opinion among the religious authorities in Jerusalem (§595). They feared Roman reaction to His rising popularity but the Sanhedrin had no power to put Him to death, so they accused Him of political revolt before Pilate (§596).
2. Stating that "The personal sin of the participants (Judas, the Sanhedrin, Pilate) is known to God alone" (§597), the CCC specifically follows Vatican II's *Nostra Aetate* 4¹¹ in not laying blame on the "Jews in Jerusalem as a whole," citing Jesus' and Peter's forgiveness, as well as "Jews of different times and places."
3. Following *Roman Catechism* I, 5, 11, the Magisterium (teaching office of the RCC) declares that "our sins made the Lord Christ suffer

the torment of the cross" (§598).

4. Jesus' death was "by God's set purpose and foreknowledge," according to Peter in his first sermon on Pentecost (Acts 2:23, §599). This does not mean, though, that those who delivered up Jesus were mere passive players.
5. God permitted the acts of Herod, Pilate, gentiles and Jews in Jerusalem who were blind to this purpose (Acts 4:27-28, §600).
6. Jesus' death for our sins is a fulfillment of scriptures (I Cor 15:3), specifically Isa. 53: 7-8 (cf. Acts 8: 32-33, §601).
7. In the divine plan of salvation, Christ, who knew no sin, was made sin so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God (II Cor 5:21, §602).
8. This means Christ "assumed us in the state of our waywardness of sin" but He Himself did not sin (John 8: 46). His death reconciled us to God (Rom 5: 10, §603).
9. Christ's death manifests God's love for us "prior to any merit on our part" (§604). I John 4: 10, 19, Romans 5:8 are cited.
10. Christ died for all men without exception (§605).
11. Jesus was willing to die because it was His father's will; by His obedience He shows His love for the Father (§606).
12. Christ's redemptive passion was the reason for His incarnation (§607).
13. Christ the Suffering Servant and Paschal Lamb came "to serve and give His life a ransom for many" (Mk. 10:45, §608).
14. "In suffering and death his humanity became the free and perfect instrument of his divine love which

desires the salvation of men" (§609).

15. He anticipated the free offering of His life and transformed His last supper into the memorial of His voluntary offering (§610).
 16. The Eucharist is a memorial of His sacrifice; the apostles were instituted as priests of the New Covenant (§611).
 17. Christ's human nature is destined for eternal life and has been assumed by the divine nature (§612).
 18. Christ's death is the unique and definitive sacrifice, completing and surpassing all other sacrifices (§613-14).
 19. By obeying unto death, Jesus substituted our disobedience and made satisfaction for our sins to the Father (§615).
 20. This redemptive sacrifice for all is made possible by the existence in Christ of the divine person of the Son (§616).
 21. The Council of Trent teaches that Christ's holy passion merited justification for us (§617).
 22. In His incarnate divine person Christ has united Himself to every man, enabling us to participate in His sacrifice. Mary is connected more intimately than any other person in the mystery of this suffering (§618).
- Based on this section alone, we could say that the Roman Catholic teaching on the death of Christ is rooted in Scripture. Taking note of the phrase "prior to any merit on our part" (§604), we can even say that the Roman Catholic Church does teach that redemption is accomplished not because of any merit on our part. However, their understanding of redemption is that it is continued in the

(Continued on page 4)

FACULTY ON THE MOVE

✂ Dr. Joseph Shao was invited to teach “Study on Ecclesiastes” at the 21st Reformed Seminary in Indonesia last April 2 to 9, 2004. He also conducted CCOWE Week meetings on April 30 to May 5, 2004.

✂ Prof. Rosa Shao represented the Philippine Chapter of the CCOWE Women’s Fellowship in their Planning Session for the 2nd Women’s Convention. The meeting took place in Malaysia on March 10-14, 2004.

✂ Dr. & Mrs. Samuel Pan were invited as speakers at the Family Retreat of Cagayan Gospel Church on April 8-11, 2004.

✂ Dr. Jane Chuaunsu and Prof. Jean Uayan were invited to teach and give seminars at the Negev Bible Training Institute in Auckland, New Zealand, from May 3 to June 3, 2004. Dr. Chuaunsu taught “Practical Christian Education” and Prof. Uayan lectured on “Theology and Culture.”

✂ This summer we had the privilege of inviting three lecturers from the Lin Sen Nan Lu Church in Taiwan. All three are elders of this Church: Elder Li Jing Yan taught Mentoring Disciples; Elder Zheng Jia Chang taught Church Administration and Management; and Elder Li Jian taught Cults and Comparative Religion.

BSOP Sundays were held at the following churches:

Quezon City Evangelical Church
(Jan. 25)

United Evangelical Church of
Marbel (Mar. 7)

Cebu Gospel Church (Mar. 21)

New Millennium Evangelical
Church (Mar. 28)



Congratulations to
alumni Joshua
Ong and Jamiely
Sia (Class ‘03)
who were joined in mat-
rimony on May 2, 2004 at Jubi-
lee Evangelical Church.

Another joyous occasion was
the union of alumnae Jocelyn
Ang (Class ‘02) and Pastor Rey
Martin on April 28, 2004. The
newly weds are serving in Myan-
mar as missionaries.

(WELCOME, Continued from page 1)

parted for some time. Anke went to China as a language student and Michael went to the Netherlands to study Hebrew and got a doctorate in Hebrew linguistics at Leiden University.

Our children, Judit and Christian, are four and two years old respectively. Our third child will be born in September, God willing. At BSOP Michael teaches Old Testament and Hebrew, the language the Old Testament was written in. We hope that through our ministry at the seminary students and a growing number of people in the Chinese churches will know in their hearts that the words from Psalm 119:103 are true: “How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!”

liturgy - herein lies the problem. *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, or Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy 2 specifically states that it is “especially in the divine sacrifice of the Eucharist, [that] the ‘work of our redemption is accomplished’.”¹² Although the death of Christ is a historical fact, its effect and benefits continue until He comes and are to be availed of only through the mass and the Eucharist. Thus redemption covers the whole process of conversion, sanctification and up to the end of the life of the Catholic. Because of this view, the Catholic is bound to celebrate the Eucharist not simply as a memorial but as a sacramental sacrifice where “the same Christ who offered himself once in a bloody manner on the altar of the cross is . . . offered in an unbloody manner.”¹³ As long as the RCC teaches eucharistic sacrifice, transubstantiation¹⁴ (bread and wine are changed into the body and blood of Jesus Christ, §1373-77, 1413) and worship the Eucharistic elements¹⁵ (§ 1378-81), no matter how biblical their view of the passion of Christ and despite the statement on §611 that the Eucharist is a “memorial of his sacrifice,” an Evangelical can never approve nor accept these teachings as biblical and theologically sound. Furthermore, to insist that Christ’s sacrifice must continue in an “unbloody manner” is incompatible with the clear biblical insistence that “without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness” (Heb 9:22), that Christ’s death was a once-for-all accomplished event (Heb. 7: 23-27; 9: 24-26; 10: 11-12).

Going back to Fr. Noia’s interview, I find nothing objectionable with his comments on the sacrifice and obedience of Christ, but his views on Mary reflect the position still being held in many sections in CCC. In §618, Mary is considered to be most intimately connected to Christ’s sacrifice, most likely because she is His mother. In §964, Mary’s role in the Church (as well as in redemption, §502-06), is “inseparable to her union with Christ and flows directly from it.”

This union was made manifest from the virginal conception to the death of Christ, “above all at the hour of his Passion.” It is even clearly stated in *Lumen Gentium* 58, that

Thus the Blessed Virgin advanced in her pilgrimage of faith, and faithfully persevered in her union with her Son unto the cross, where she stood, in keeping with the divine plan, enduring with her only begotten Son the intensity of his suffering, associated herself with his sacrifice in her mother’s heart, and lovingly consenting to the immolation of this victim which was born of her.

In effect this is saying that as mother of Christ, Mary not only endured with His suffering on the cross, but she “consented”¹⁶ to Christ’s death. This is dangerously close to giving Mary a position that exceeds the biblical portrayal of her being an obedient, human instrument in the divine plan of salvation. This is also the paragraph that leads to the RC teaching of Mary’s assumption and role as mother of the church (See §965-71). To be fair, this is not portrayed in Gibson’s movie, where Mary seems to be constantly nearby.¹⁷ There are, however, extra-biblical scenes of Mary: begging the Roman soldiers for help when the Jewish priests are taking away Jesus Christ,¹⁸ rushing forward to Jesus when he stumbled on the way to crucifixion and saying “I’m with you,” wiping the blood of Christ from the grounds of the Praetorium where Christ was scourged, kissing the foot of Christ who was hanging on the cross, and the famous “Pieta” position of cradling the dead body of Christ. Such constant depiction of Mary and focus on her face detracts attention from the suffering Savior and over-highlights the role of Mary in Christ’s passion.¹⁹

If I were to converse with a Roman Catholic and the subject of Christ’s passion (and the movie) cropped up, I would start off by saying that Protestants

and Catholics alike view the suffering and death of Jesus Christ as extremely brutal, just as it was realistically portrayed in the movie, but at the same time absolutely real and necessary. The essence of this sacrifice is that Christ died to “absorb the wrath of God,”²⁰ to free us from sin, to make us righteous and holy and to secure our eternal life. Because of our sin and rebellion against God, His justice demands that we must be punished, and the wages of sin is death (Rom 6:23; Ezk 18:4). Yet at the same time, God loved man perfectly, and He was not content to show only His wrath but also His love. The only solution was to send His Son to bear the punishment (Gal 3:13) in our place (Rom 3:25-26). Mel Gibson was the one who hammered the nails into Christ’s wrists in the movie and he emphasized this when he was interviewed. We are the ones who nailed Christ on the cross. Our response to this great sacrifice must be to accept it by faith, and to show our love for God by living a life modeled after Christ. When Christ died on the cross for us, God cancelled the debts of sin and declared us righteous; from then on we become new creatures in Christ. This is a once-for-all, completed and final sacrifice (Heb 7: 23-27; 9: 24-26; 10: 11-12) that does not have to be repeated through attending mass and partaking the Eucharist. This is the main difference between Protestants and Catholics with regard to Christ’s death.²¹ When Protestants go to church it is to worship God and have fellowship with Him and with fellow believers. When we celebrate the Eucharist it is to remember what Jesus paid to secure our redemption and to enjoy His presence (Heb 10: 19-20) and live by His grace through the help of the Holy Spirit.

Should the Roman Catholic bring up the issue that Protestants pay too little attention to Christ’s death because they don’t go through all the Lenten rituals, I would show her the Heidelberg Catechism (1563) Q. 37 to 40, Westminster Larger Catechism (1648) Q 49,[22] and Calvin’s *Institutes* Book IV. XVII.1-29.