

The Passion? (05-Mar-04)



"When religion grows weak superstition grows strong."
—William Barclay

05-Mar-04

A Passion for *The Passion?*

The controversial movie, *The Passion of the Christ*, dominated the news long before its release for public viewing. Its opening was timed to coincide with the beginning of the Catholic Lenten season to magnify its subject matter to the greatest extent. Because of the film's controversial nature, director Mel Gibson was in the news virtually every day for about six weeks before its Ash Wednesday premier. Has a movie ever received this much free, national attention before it was even shown to the public?

If nothing else, all of this concentrated attention certainly seems to have guaranteed its financial success, having earned \$117 million in the first five days. Critic Lawrence Toppman of *The Charlotte Observer* writes, "*Passion* has succeeded principally for the same reason as *The Lord of the Rings* and the first *Harry Potter* and other recent marketing successes: Producers mounted a clever, massive advertising and publicity campaign that made it a 'must see.'"

But is it also a spiritual success because it presents God's truth?

I have not seen the film, but I have read at least 25 reviews of it from a wide variety of sources. Catholic writers are almost unanimously and zealously supportive. The secular media, for the most part, appears timid, perhaps because they are not well versed in much of the Bible and do not want to appear ignorant. Andy Rooney, the cynical critic featured at the end of each *60 Minutes* program, grouses that [the crucifixion](#) scenes were good for a couple of laughs. Some religious, evangelical critics are scathingly negative.

One thing this movie might accomplish for church members is that it exposes a number of religious leaders' true standing in the religious spectrum of the United States. Despite their public acclaim as evangelicals, Billy Graham, Dr. James Dobson, and Rick Warren have all made statements on the film's authenticity that are very similar to the Pope's. They have been less-than-upfront regarding its major shortcomings, perhaps because of concerns that their reputations will suffer.

The Passion has been vigorously promoted as the most faithful account of the trial and crucifixion of [Jesus Christ](#) ever filmed. But one critic listed fifteen major departures from the Scriptures! This is because Mr. Gibson used not only the Bible but Catholic traditions and the visionary meditations of a mystical, eighteenth-century Augustinian nun, Catherine Emmerich. Her dreams and visions were inserted into the movie along with the Catholic *Stations of the Cross* devotional as though they were part of Scripture's revelations. In addition, Catholic commentators are saying that, when one sits through this film, he is actually observing the mass, during which Christ is "killed" each time it is performed! The Bible says He died once ([Hebrews 9:12](#), 24-28; 10:10-14), not endlessly. What is more, the movie presents Mary as co-sufferer and co-redeemer with Christ.

Of special note is that everybody agrees the crucifixion scenes are brutally violent. Is this really necessary for one's salvation? The answer is a resounding, "No!" All [Christians](#) called into God's church since the first century have needed only God's very general descriptions in the Scriptures to instruct them. In His [wisdom](#), He has deemed that what He inspired to be written is sufficient. We do not need to wallow in the violence of this unrelenting, bloody, and dramatic portrayal.

This film does not proclaim [the gospel](#). Jesus Himself said the gospel is of the [Kingdom of God](#) ([Mark 1:14-15](#)), not the gospel of His death for our sins. His death is one event toward the completion of God's purpose. It is a major event, to be sure, but it is still just one step in a huge, creative operation.

One critic justified the film's many errors by saying [God](#) uses many means of getting His truths across: He even made a donkey talk. However, the critic carelessly forgets that the donkey did not lie. This film contains major lies! It is a work of devilish art, not truth, in which the artist takes many liberties to put the stamp of his beliefs in his work. This movie breaks God's command not to add to His Word.

A final thought stems from [Haggai 2:10-14](#), where the prophet asks the priests whether purity can be derived from something defiled. The answer returns, "Absolutely not!" [Holiness](#) is derived only from what is already holy. The film is not a holy source; God is in no way involved. It preaches another gospel and another Jesus ([Galatians 1:6-10](#)), and we are commanded at this time of the year to remember "that a little leaven leavens the whole lump" ([I Corinthians 5:6](#)).

- John W. Ritenbaugh

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[The Awesome Cost of Salvation](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

The world's religions are in abject bondage to falsehood because they do not observe the Passover. Freedom comes to God's called out ones incrementally from continuing on the way- the relationship between God and us. It is this relationship which is the most important thing Christ has died for. We need to be sobered at the awesomeness of the cost to set us free from sin- how far Christ was willing to be pushed. Immense have been the preparations for our

ransom- involving billions of years (Hebrews 11:3, I Corinthians 10:11) and the death of our Savior. Because we have been purchased, we have an obligation to our Purchaser.

From the Archives: Featured Article

by

If you would like to subscribe to the C.G.G. Weekly newsletter, please visit our [Email Subscriptions page](#).
