

COMMENTARIES ON 'THE PASSION OF THE CHRIST' by Randy Bissell: A passionate appeal_22304

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COMMENTARIES ON 'THE PASSION OF THE CHRIST': A passionate appeal

By Randy Bissell

I would like to explain to fellow Christians why I am hesitant about seeing the long-anticipated Mel Gibson-produced movie about Christ's death, "The Passion of the Christ."

Please understand that it is not my intention to persuade any other Christian to see or not to see the film. I have no agenda for encouraging a boycott the movie. I am simply asking myself if it is a film that I ought to see. To that end, I have begun questioning what my fellow Christians may be seeking or anticipating from this cinematic experience.

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—Randy Bissell

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Like many Christians, I have eagerly read numerous articles and editorials about the upcoming release of the “controversial” film. I’m sure that others have chuckled over the seemingly false accusations of anti-Semitism, most amusingly the worry over whether or not the “Jews” killed Jesus—or if the film is too soft on the Romans. I suppose that because the Romans are not around anymore, Jews may feel the solitary object of blame for Jesus’ death. If the movie follows the collective theme of the gospels, as it claims, blame will fall with all of us. As both Mel Gibson and the lead actor, James Caviezel, have expressed before the release, we all share the responsibility for the unjust and brutal murder of our Savior.

The principle dimension in the appeal of the upcoming film is well-publicized realism in the brutality of the crucifixion—realistic and bloody enough to require an R rating. The pope is purported to have expressed, “It is as it was.” Billy Graham cried. Mel Gibson, himself, has expressed that some will find the film very disturbing or sickening because of the gore.

Don’t the gospels tell us enough about what happened to Jesus? Are there clear descriptions of the scourging, the crown of thorns, carrying his cross, and Golgotha? Perhaps not! Must I see with my own eyes the flesh flayed from his back, the blood covering his body and matting his hair, the nails piercing the flesh, the water and blood flowing from his side? The movie promises to show me these things in technological splendor. Will it deliver an awesome crucifixion in Dolby digital sound?

As I consider this, I recall that have vividly seen Jesus die a brutal and cruel death many times. Most who have studied the Bible have seen these things. The account—the true account—the only complete account of these things is found in the gospels. The gospels are not screenplays; they are eyewitness accounts of what happened. I have pored over those precious words, savoring their details, realizing that my personal belief, my trusting faith in that forsaken and broken man, Jesus, my Lord, has saved my soul.

Mel Gibson's interpretation of the crucifixion cannot be good enough. It cannot be correct enough. It cannot be brutal enough. It cannot be complete enough to replace the vision in my mind's eye of what happened to my Lord. I come away from the gospels keenly aware that I am to blame, that I put Jesus on that cross. And that once and for all, he died for me. Will I come away from the movie knowing that, or will I just see Gibson's depiction of the horror that Jesus faced? Will that image be so powerful as to replace my personal vision of what happened?

So what are we, as Christians, seeking from this film? What do we seek from the graphic brutality depicted? Does the presentation of indescribable violence to our Lord on the wide-screen make it acceptable because it is "so realistic?" Many of my fellow Christians would label graphic depictions of human sexuality (even between married adults) in the theater as obscenity! Might such graphic violence likewise be obscene?

No doubt many well-meaning Christians plan on taking the kids! Church groups are renting the theaters for viewing by families. Some church schools have suggested field trips for children as young as 6th graders. Forget the R rating! "See kids, see what they did to Jesus!" "He died that brutal death because of you!" What are children (or the childish) expected to see in the graphic detail of the public execution of God? Might that two hours be better spent sharing the true word from the gospels?

Mel Gibson has made his living in an industry hostile to Christian sensibility and values. The movies he has directed and starred in have largely been excessively violent, even the critically acclaimed and historically themed films. Let me point out that, like many Christians, I am a Mel Gibson fan. He may be a great filmmaker, but is he a trustworthy biblical historian? As an actor, a filmmaker, an artist, his motivation is for everyone to see his work—to see his artful perspective. But is Gibson's perspective the right one for me and my family? Is it the real story, the fifth gospel or an artful counterfeit? I'm not absolutely sure. Are you?

In discussions of this film, Gibson has been identified as a strong follower of conservative Roman Catholic faith. I honestly believe that in "The Passion" he has sincerely produced the best, most realistic, most accurate film ever about Jesus' death ever made (not a particularly long list of competitors). But I am suspicious of a film sold on the aspect of the violence done against my Lord, created by a man that holds a particular view of Christianity that perpetuates that violence whenever Mass is celebrated. That sounds anti-Catholic, but I intend no offense.

Am I willing to replace my "once and for all" and support Gibson's now "showing on three screens" and "coming soon to DVD"? Is my mind's eye worth giving up for Mel's vision?.

So, what do we do? Ready to go?

I'm still thinking about it.

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News of religion, faith, missions, Bible study and Christian ministry among Texas Baptist churches, in the BGCT, the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) and around the world.