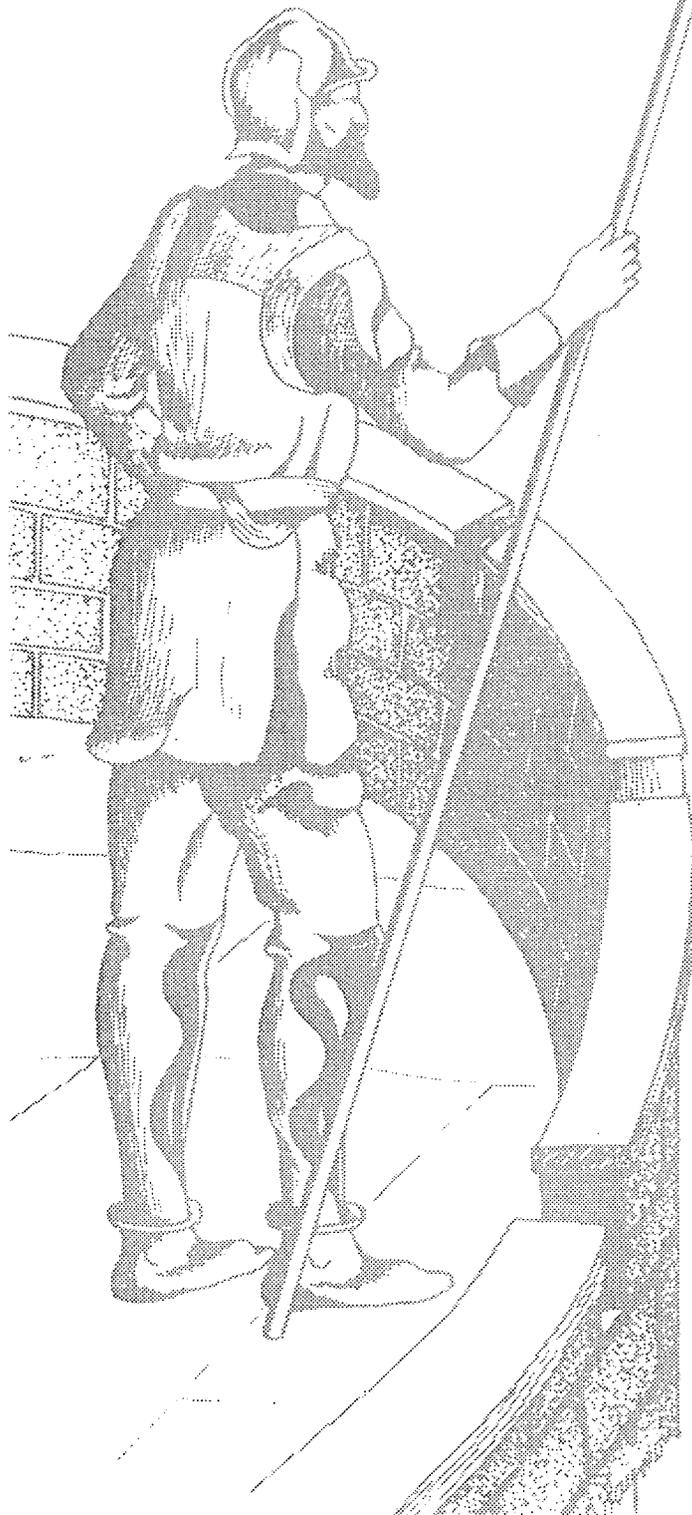


"Watchman, what of the night?"

"The hour has come, the hour is striking, and striking at you,
the hour and the end!"

Eze. 7:6 (Moffatt)



Comments

on the

Passion

Editor's Preface

The Media furor that surrounded the premiere of Mel Gibson's "The Passion" is behind us. However, the movie, newly released on DVD, continues to draw thousands and is already the highest grossing film of the year. At the time "The Passion" premiered, we were involved with an analysis of the reprint of *Questions on Doctrine* as an Adventist "classic" with annotations by Dr. George Knight. There is only so much that one can cover in a brief monthly "Thought Paper." In this issue, we return in point of time to a brief discussion of the movie. No better preface could be written than to share a letter received at the time of the movie's release from a thoughtful and dedicated student of God's word. It read:

As I have viewed on television the brief preview scenes of violence and blood shed from Mel Gibson's movie, and have listened to the rhetoric and various analyses offered, I have found myself wondering, What does God think of this? What does Christ Himself think of this spectacle?

Many have commented on whether the movie is true to the gospel narratives, and many have said Yes. I beg to differ. The Gospel writers did not describe in gory detail the sufferings of Christ.. Only twice, as I have found, is there a mention of blood in the story of Christ's sufferings: first in the garden of Gethsemane when "his sweat was at it were great drops of blood falling to the ground" (Luke 22:44); and John reports, that after Jesus was already dead, "one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came there out blood and water " (19:34). It was the character that Christ displayed through His trials and execution that the gospel writers emphasized. The physical agonies are mainly left to our imagination as we contemplate the scenes that are described in the words of Scripture.

(Continued on page 5)

“The Passion of the Christ”

Clifford & Georgene Haak

At the time of this writing, the film, “The Passion of the Christ,” has already grossed more than 300 million dollars and is now available on DVD. Much has already been written about this film. We can now look back on the impact of this movie that is so far reaching into the lives of every person who reads the newspaper, watches TV, or even walks into a department store. It has become one of the most popular and acclaimed movies of this era. Is it because it is an artful masterpiece that this movie has become so vogue? Does it present some great truth that transforms the beholder? Or is it another stepping stone in fulfilment of prophecy? We will not attempt to become movie critics in this discussion. It is not our intent to critique actors, costumes, etc. It is our purpose only to answer the following questions: First, why was this movie produced at this point in time? (We have had other movies produced depicting the life and death of our Savior.) Second, why does this film elicit an incredible following of the masses? And third, how should we relate to this event?

To find the answer to the first question, why was this movie made, we must look at Mel Gibson, an Australian actor/director. This film was his brainchild. He has stated that it was his intent to make this film as authentic as possible, but the question remains, authentic to what? It seems that some years back, Gibson came upon a book written by a German nun, Anne Catherine Emmerich, entitled, *The Dolorous Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ*. This book planted a seed in his mind and was the motivating factor in his making of this film (*The New Yorker*, 9/15/03). According to one of “unofficial” websites, Mr. Gibson used four sources for the screenplay: The above noted book; *The City of God* by Mary of Agreda; the counsel of high-level theologians and church officials at the Vatican, and the Gospels. The movie was done in Latin and Aramaic. This

necessitated the services of a Los Angeles-based Jesuit named Bill Fulco, who served as the dialogue coach. Mr. Gibson is a devout Roman Catholic who undoubtedly wanted to bring his strong beliefs to this film and then recreate them in the minds of the viewers.

Let us focus on the first author. We will list short biographical items which we believe you should know about Catherine Emmerich. She was born in 1774 and at a young age experienced stigmata (bleeding in the hands, head and feet) which is the ultimate proof of sainthood for Catholics. It is considered as evidence of the favour of God that the true Catholic is allowed to imitate the suffering of Christ. Anne also had many visions, many of which were visits to Purgatory on a regular basis. It is related in her biography, *Ven. Anne Catherine Emmerich*, that she saw that Protestants suffered more than Catholics because there was no priest to pray for them. It is alleged that she subsisted only on holy water and communion wafers from the Catholic mass the last twelve years of her life. According to the biography shortly after her death in 1824, it was reported that her body had been stolen. She was exhumed, and when the casket was opened, her body was found without decay and fresh. Emmerich’s visions on the life of Christ were published in 1833. The most violent scenes appearing in this movie come from her book, *The Dolorous Passion of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ*. You will find no mention of these events in the accounts given to us by witnesses that were present at the Cross. Emmerich also wrote another book, *The Life of the Blessed Virgin*. There is no evidence available to suggest that any of this book about Mary was used in the making of the film.

Mary of Agreda was born in 1602 and authored the book, *The Mystical City of God*. In this book, she offers many details about Mary the mother of Jesus that are not found in the Bible. According to the *New Catholic Dictionary*, Mary of Agreda was born into a wealthy family. She was one of four children. Her family was extremely pious. In 1618, her sisters and her mother became Franciscan nuns and her father and brother became Franciscan monks. Their

castle was then converted into a convent. She was chosen as its Abbess in 1627 and held this position for the next 38 years of her life. She supposedly had the gift of bi-location (having the capability of being in two places at the same time). Mary was a visionary and given to ecstasies and trances. She received an apparition of the mother of Jesus which she used as the basis of her book, *The Mystical City of God*. She declared that "not only was the Word conceived before all these by eternal generation from the Father, but His temporal generation from the Virgin Mother full of grace, had already been decreed in the divine mind" (*Taken from the Ven. Mary of Agreda*). In other words, the Christ was "birthed" of the Father before time existed. Mary of Agreda also stated that "before the second coming of Christ, Mary must come more than ever, shine in mercy, might and grace in order to bring unbelievers into the Catholic faith" (*ibid*).

It is no secret that this movie does not follow the Biblical account of Christ's last twelve hours as given in the Gospels. It introduces many events which are found nowhere in the Bible. For example: Christ being thrown off a bridge; demons posing as children; the temple being split during an earthquake; and Peter confessing his sins to Mary. We, therefore, can classify this movie as mostly fiction rather than true historical drama. One can see that this is just another one of Mr. Gibson's violent movies.

So, if what is portrayed is no more than Roman Catholic fiction, then why did so many churches including Seventh-day Adventist churches rent theatres and encourage their members to view this inaccurate depiction of Christ's last twelve hours? Would they do the same for any other violent film? The answer to that question is a resounding, NO! The question remains, why this particular movie at this specific point in time? The answer is simply damage control. This movie is nothing more than a Roman Catholic evangelistic tool (*Daily Catholic*, Jan. 17, 2004), designed to divert attention away from what the church has been caught doing. The movie is based on two Catholic mystics. It has a Catholic producer, Catholic technical advisers, and portrays all the basics found in the Roman

Catholic mass. Sleeping Christians who do not have a working knowledge of the Bible would have a hard time recognizing the obvious deviations from Bible truth and therefore, would believe the lie perpetrated by the film. We could say then that this movie is used to convert the masses into believing Catholic dogma. Mel Gibson is becoming the greatest Catholic evangelist of this era. It has also made him one of the wealthiest actors ever. Beyond the financial gain to Gibson, the Catholic church sorely needed this film. The Roman Church was in desperate need to repair its damaged image due to the multiple sex crimes uncovered. They needed something to boost their image and distract the media in order to get themselves from under the microscope that today's events had placed them.

The one word that can best describe this movie is, "violent." Mel Gibson takes great pains to not only graphically display the brutality toward Christ by the Jews and Roman soldiers, but also to lead the viewer to believe the intense suffering by Christ is the basis of our salvation. It completely ignores the fact that the suffering in the Garden was much more intense than any human actions could produce. Many martyrs have endured tremendous physical pain, but none but Christ could experience that which He experienced when He bore the guilt of the sins of the world. During the Dark Ages, thousands suffered similar tortures inflicted by the Catholic Church. But only Christ would suffer the second death so as to redeem us from our sins as He did on the cross. Salvation came by His death, not His suffering (I Cor. 15:3). Salvation by works is a hallmark of Catholic theology. Christ died once for us (I John 4:10), however in Roman theology, Christ must suffer again and again, at the whim of a priest during Mass. A Catholic Catechism asks and answers: "Is the Mass a different sacrifice from that offered on the Cross? No; because the same Christ, who once offered himself a bleeding victim to his Heavenly Father on the cross, continues to offer himself, in an unbloody manner, by the hands of his priests, on our altars (*James Butler's Catechism*, p. 42). The reason that the Catholic crucifix depicts Christ in a state of suffering is because Catholicism teaches that Christ must continue to

do so in order for us to be saved. To them Christ's anguish will never cease.

This film also presents a large dose of anti-Semitism. The movie portrays the whole Jewish nation as being against Christ's mission on earth. It is true that what some of the priests did was cruel in their intent to destroy Him, but that is not the whole truth. The Bible tells us that Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, two members of the Sanhedrin, arranged with Pilate to take care of the body of Christ (John 19:38-41). Luke tells us that there were disciples in Jerusalem, many of whom were priests that were obedient to the faith (Acts 6:6). It is misleading of Mel Gibson to typecast the Jewish nation as a people that are totally inhumane. Is there a possible reason for this projection to the audience? This is an open question, and needs careful study.

The most hideous error occurs as Mary is portrayed throughout the movie as not only present, but also the central figure in each critical moment. From the arrest to the trial, and even in the suffering and death of Christ, Mel Gibson has Mary present. The depiction reaches its pinnacle when Peter is depicted as begging Mary for forgiveness, (Something, only God can do). It is at this point that the film leads the audience to believe that Mary is co-mediatrix with Christ. The information the Bible gives us on this matter, however, is that Mary was present only at the cross, just before His death (John 19:26). She never appeared before any Roman or Jew in an intercessory role for anyone. Another error: The Bible plainly states that works alone do not produce the merits for salvation (Eph. 2:8-9). Other errors could be cited but space has its limits. Is this just another step in bridging the gulf between the Protestant position and the Catholic erroneous view of the Holy Scriptures? The Bible speaks clearly for itself. Not one jot or tittle is to be misplaced. There is much joy in salvation. Using the Holy Scriptures as our guide, we can come to only one conclusion: This movie in no way portrays the everlasting Gospel that is to be spread throughout the earth before the glorious coming of our Lord, the second time.

This brings us to the second question: Why are great masses following this movie touting it as a great Christian experience? Catholic theology teaches that we can have salvation in our sins through suffering, not salvation from our sins through the death of Christ. They teach, based in tradition, that we can do as we please, confess to a priest, pay money, say a phrase a few times and be able to come before the throne of Christ without spot or blemish. In other words, Catholicism says we do not have to fall on the Rock and be broken. This movie does not portray the true sufferings that Christ endured when He became sin for us (II Cor. 5:21). It is easy to see the reason the masses who are seeking a cheap ticket to heaven, grasp onto such thoughts. We are told in Rev. 13:3 that all the world would wonder after "the beast." We are warned that the majority "will not endure sound doctrine," but "shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables" (II Tim. 4:3-4). That is exactly what the movie is, a gathering together of Roman Catholic "fables."

This brings us to the final question: How should we relate to the film? Or more correctly, How should I relate to this lie? Under certain conditions, it is permissible for a Catholic to lie. One reads:

Notwithstanding, indeed, although it is not lawful to lie, or to feign what is not, however it is lawful to dissemble what is, or to cover the truth with words, or other ambiguous and doubtful signs, for a just cause, and when there is not a necessity of confessing (*Ins and Outs of Romanism*, p. 172).

Therefore, what Mel Gibson is doing, spreading a lie, is not wrong in his or their lies. He has a purpose, the conversion of the world to Catholicism. The Bible tells us that no lie shall enter heaven (Rev. 21:27). God does not lie (Heb. 6:18). More directly, Satan is the father of lies (John 8:44). This film has nothing to do with truth, salvation or any of the precepts it claims to project. Of the final remnant of God's earth children, the Word declares that in their mouths will be found no guile (falsehood). If we profess to be followers of Christ, we will have

nothing to do with this, which is but another of a series of traps set by Satan to draw people away from truth into his webs of deceit. It is quite probable that more movies, plays, books and even expounders will come on the scene portraying more of the Catholic dogma and superstition that is so apparent in this movie. Seventh-day Adventists have been blessed with greater information and insight on this subject than others. We have been told:

The Protestants of the United States will be foremost in stretching their hands across the gulf to grasp the hand of Spiritualism; they will reach over the abyss to clasp hands with the Roman power; and under the influence of this threefold union, this country will follow in the steps of Rome in trampling on the rights of conscience. (*Great Controversy*, p. 588).

We need to watch and pray lest Satan deceive us into thinking that these errors are sent from heaven. We are told to "prove all things and hold fast to that which is good" (I Thess. 5:21). We dare not be silent and allow these errors to desensitize us. Satan has an agenda. He wants to take anyone and everyone with him that he possible can. He lays traps to snare all who will come close. We need to be on our guard at every moment lest we believe his lies and become a victim.

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Editor's Preface, from page 1

I do not minimize in my mind the sufferings of Christ, which were no doubt great due to the cruelty of those participating in the trial and crucifixion, and due to the very nature of that method of capital punishment. Crucifixion was a common practice under Roman rule of that day. Countless criminals (or those convicted as such) were put to death in that manner. Were Christ's physical sufferings in His human nature any greater than that of others? Probably not. But His agony of spirit was no doubt greater than that which any human being ever has or ever will endure. Such cannot be adequately described in words or portrayed by an actor in a film!

It was this agony of spirit that crushed the life out of Him. His life was not taken from Him by the

crucifixion; according to the Scripture, He willingly laid it down, gave it up for us. The purpose for which He had come to the world, the weight He bore of the sins of the world, the agony of separation from His Father in heaven, caused by His becoming sin for us, bearing "the iniquity of us all," (Isa. 53:6; also see II Corinthians 5:21) – those are the things that took His life. It was "with a loud voice" that Jesus cried, "Father into thy hands I commend my spirit." (Luke 23:46). One who was dying due to the rigors of the cross would hardly have had a "loud voice" with which to cry out.

The last point that I wish to make is that, to my thinking, it must be highly offensive to God and to Christ (as it is to me) for a mere, sinful, mortal to attempt to portray Christ in play-acting the scenes of His life (and death) while on earth. Theatrics and pretence cannot adequately represent the divine-human God-man that Christ was! Scripture has given us the views that we need to take into our minds and hearts. Any movie that plays to mankind's gross appetite for blood and violence cannot be pleasing to God regardless of the man's attempt to justify it.

I wonder what God will think about millions of Christians flocking to the theatres, spending money on that which is not bread, rewarding Hollywood film-makers for making such a travesty. I for one do not plan to be among them.

Grace Cox

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