

A Reply to the Call to Reject Mel Gibson's film, ' The Passion of the Christ '

E L Bynum in his article has criticised Mel Gibson and his film ' The Passion of the Christ ' and called for Christians to reject it. I think Bynum, and those who share his views, have overstated their case for rejecting the film. It is a classical example of throwing out the baby with the bathwater.

First, there is the impugning of the motives of Mel Gibson. Bynum says that looking at the script of the film gave Mel Gibson ' the excuse for making another violent movie '. How does Bynum know the private mind of Gibson?

It is an unkind inference because Mel Gibson has invested \$25 million of his personal wealth to make the movie. This is a measure of the man's conviction. How many are willing to put up that huge amount of money for anything less than a life-transforming conviction? Whether it will 'in the end make a lot of money for Mel Gibson' is besides the point.

Next, the violence in the film is deplored. Violence of the sort seen in "The Passion" is not gratuitous violence, that is, violence for the sake of violence. It correctly depicts the suffering that our Lord went through for our sakes. The trouble with most of us, whether Catholic or Protestant, is that we read **Isaiah 53** with 'dispassion'. The four Gospel accounts of the last days of Christ on earth have sadly become ' the old, old story that we have heard so long'. Mel Gibson's contribution to the cause of Christ is that he has refreshingly tried to portray the unique painful events leading to Calvary with the accuracy that they deserve.

"Critics who have a problem with me don't really have a problem with me in this film. They have a problem with the four Gospels. That's where their problem is".

Mel Gibson

This statement is more Biblically perceptive than some people are willing to credit him for.

Has Mel Gibson said anything heretical? Only this. It was reported in The Washington Times that he said that Christ " could have (atoned for the sins of the world) by pricking His finger and shedding his blood. He didn't choose that. He went all the way. "

This is seized upon as an instance of 'Gibson's False Doctrine' because he has dared to make Scripture say that there could be atonement without, in Bynum's words, ' both the dying and the bleeding of Jesus Christ '.

This is indeed a strange aspersion to cast on what is only a hyperbolic statement made by Gibson to drive home the point that Christ did not draw back from shedding **all** his blood on the cross.

Hollywood has been and continues to be the spawning ground for a lot of violence as well as vulgar, polluting nonsense masquerading as art or culture. No one disputes that this is broadly true.

But, think more deeply for a moment. Is it not a wonderful thing that God has done - to use one of Satan's tools to turn it into a tool to cast light and understanding on an important portion of the Gospels and to move people from apathy to conviction? A movie that stirs emotions in the right direction is to be welcomed. 'The Passion of the Christ' has received almost universal acclaim from all Christians who have viewed it precisely because it evokes empathy and sorrow from seeing the graphic brutality suffered by one Man, executed for no other reason than that He was hated for doing good while claiming to redeem mankind from their sin.

Bynum, quoting **Romans 10:17**, says that faith comes by hearing. "Please note," he emphasises, "this verse does not say by seeing, but by hearing!!" In other words, we don't need this film, or anything visual, to help the preaching of the Gospel. This is a rather wooden interpretation of **Romans 10:17**, and one wonders whether one should take Bynum seriously!

If hearing is more important than seeing, why, you suppose, were the miracles done? Were they not for people to **see** that they were signs verifying the Lordship of Christ? Why were the parables told? Was it not for the people to **see** in their minds' eye the truths the parables were meant to illustrate? Did not our Lord say:

"For the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, so that I should heal them. "

Matthew 13:15

Has not that other famous film 'JESUS' been a resounding world-wide success in bringing many to the saving knowledge of the Lord among those who have seen it and responded to the invitation of **John 3:16**? The film has been translated into Cantonese, Teochew, Amoy, Tamil, Indonesian, Thai, Sindhi, Punjabi, Urdu and others.

Don't miss the divine irony of it all. That God should so deeply move a Roman Catholic actor/director regarding what Christ means to him personally, and then use his film to turn Hollywood rightside up. Bynum should pray that God will use this film to open the eyes of many to see Jesus as the Messiah.

We may even hope that Bynum will someday retract the statement made in his article: "How could we expect Gibson to know much about the Bible, after all he is a Roman Catholic?"

I am beginning to understand why Paul wrote:

"What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is preached; and in this I rejoice, yes, and will rejoice."

Philippians 1:18

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