

Gibson's Gory Story

Emily Cheney

It is Gibson's Gory Story that ends with an unconvincing tomb scene, for the significance of the resurrection is not given enough attention as the culminating act that displays Jesus' victory over death and the power that death represents. There are so many scenes of Jesus' physical pain, agony, tortures, and punishments, far many more than are found in each gospel. This focus on Jesus' pain has the potential for diverting viewers' attention away from the reality that many were crucified in Jesus' time and many today suffer everyday unjustly. It is primarily Mel Gibson's Passion Play, not an accurate portrayal of Jesus' death and the events leading up to his death because we have four versions in the New Testament, not one. The attempt to provide a realistic version may mislead some viewers from understanding that this is one interpretation.

1. He harmonizes the four gospels, not respecting how each gospel is emphasizing different aspects and is written for different audiences, at different times, in different places.
2. He adds material not found in any of the four gospels: — He psychologizes Judas' betrayal and presents him as crazy and presents Pilate as having a moral dilemma. Ancient writers were not interested in the psyche, since Freud had not developed his psychoanalytical theories.
 - He presents Jesus as thinking back while he is carrying his cross to be crucified. We do not know what he was thinking.
 - Satan appears many more times than mentioned in any one of the gospels.
 - Mary and other characters such as Simon of Cyrene and Pilate' wife have a far larger role than found in any of the gospels.
3. The film does have the potential for perpetuating anti-Semitism:
 - Jewish leaders are responsible for Jesus' death in the film because they press for his death. The soldiers are brutes who get carried away with beating Jesus and have to be told to stop. All the beating is shown either as performed by the Jewish leaders or as the result of their advocating his death.
 - Pilate, a gentile and so not a Jew, tries to release Jesus. The scene of Pilate washing his hands and absolving him of responsibility for Jesus' death and thereby shifting this responsibility to the Jews is found only in Matthew. Gibson also uses the scene found only in John where the Jews pressure Pilate to have

Jesus crucified by saying that if Pilate releases Jesus he is opposing Caesar. By combining these scenes Gibson put the Jews in a far worse light than they need to be put. (Matthew and John are the harshest of the gospels toward the Jews.)

— The film does not furnish the word play on Barabbas's name that in Aramaic can mean Son of father so that the Jewish crowds in the uproar may have thought that they were releasing Jesus but Pilate thought that they wanted to release Barabbas.

The primary value of this film is that it may encourage people to read the four passion narratives in the four New Testament gospels so that they understand them better or read them for the first time.

Emily Cheney
Assistant Professor of Religion
University of Georgia at Athens