

Letter to the Editor
Leslie Reiter

The media hype about *The Passion of the Christ* misses the point. True, there was the violence, a bit overplayed perhaps, but, again, it was rated R for the violence. The violence depicted certainly was in keeping with what more than likely occurred from time to time in the Roman Empire. Still, it would have been more realistic if the suffering on the cross had been given greater emphasis, for crucifixion is a most agonizing death, and inflicted because of that.

To me, the greater violence was the violence done to the text. The much touted accuracy of the film early on, even going so far as to have the dialogue in Aramaic and Latin for authenticity (although the ecclesiastical pronunciation vs. classical seemed a bit anachronistic), did not pan out. I had some questions before seeing it how the film could be true to the Gospels, there being so many contrary statements therein, e.g., did his followers forsake him and flee, or did they watch from afar, or did some women and one of the disciples, gather around beneath the cross? Nevertheless, one would have hoped the events would be true to some aspect found in at least one of the Gospels, even if it did not square with them all, a sort of harmony, as it were. Here, I was much disappointed. The scene in the film depicted the soldiers tearing the garments off of Jesus roughly, rending them in so doing, yet the Gospels state the soldiers cast lots for his garments, implying they were not torn apart and one specifically states they did not tear his tunic. And why did the film depict the floor of the temple being fissured rather than the veil being rent? This not only misrepresents the text, but also destroys the symbolism.

Although one should grant an author some license in representing his story, I feel Mel Gibson stretched his imagination beyond reasonable limits throughout not only for theatrical purposes but using symbolism depicting theological ideas not present in the Gospels; while the Gospels are theological documents, by interjecting extraneous concepts, he misrepresents the Gospels. One example would be the snake crawling out from the garments of "Satan" and Jesus crushing it beneath his foot.

(One wonders how the use of a woman to portray Satan squares with contemporary thinking?) Another is the bandits' carrying their cross beams to the crucifixion, which would be in keeping with historical practice, yet Jesus' dragging the stylized Latin cross through the streets. One must surely question on historical probability Pilate's wife giving towels to the Galilean women, but for them to use them to wipe up Jesus' blood from the cobble stones is more symbolic of a present day priest carrying a napkin as he administers the Holy Sacrament.

These are just a few of inconsistencies I observed. The objection of this writer to Gibson's fanciful portrayal of the crucifixion is that so many of the viewers of the film, uninformed about what the Gospels do say, will accept it as "gospel" truth.

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