

YOUR LETTERS

The Passion of the Christ

I can understand Hugh Montefiore's reluctance to see the film, 'The Passion of the Christ' and, having just seen it, I agree that the violence is indeed sickeningly relentless and gratuitous.

Although I take his point, however, that the divinity of Jesus is impossible to convey on film, in his humanity Jesus does come across as a very attractive character ... loving, forgiving and even humorous. He is shown as having just made the first tall table in his carpenter's shop and amiably accepting the opinion of Mary that "it will never catch on!"

Having many friends and family members who are Jewish I am sensitive to the charges of anti-Semitism that have been made against this film. I did not

find this, however. Certainly the High Priests are depicted as malicious and corrupt, but I see this as rather a condemnation of the powerful seeking to destroy any inconvenient opposition, than a vilification of the race from which they come.

There is a further problem with the view of some Christians that the Jews are murderers of Christ. If one accepts that God's salvation for the world was to be accomplished through the death of Jesus, then clearly someone had to bring about that death that all mankind might benefit. Not a happy role to be cast in, but someone had to do it ... Judas, Pilate, Annas, Caiaphas, Herod and the crowd baying for the release of Barabbas, all had their grim but necessary part to play in the drama of salvation. If the High Priests had not pursued him and the crowd had not acted at their instigation, Pilate, it seems, would not have condemned him. What would then have become of God's plan?

Christine Jenkins, London SE13

I was very disappointed by Bishop Hugh's reactions which appeared in last month's 'Bridge'.

Whilst I have no wish to defend this poor and boring film, or to deny Bishop Hugh his right of opinion, I am surprised that he has joined a number of clergy I know who have criticised the film without seeing it. I would also take issue with the three points raised by Bishop Hugh for not seeing it.

Firstly, even if the medium of film hasn't helped him in his understanding, love, or worship of Jesus, it does not automatically follow that everyone else will find films

and its emphasis on the 'saving blood' and 'bleeding heart' of Christ. Whilst I accept that the film is excessive in its depiction of violence, it is important not to lose sight of our Lord's physical and emotional pain and not to sanitise the passion to the point of inconsequence.

Why should we limit ourselves to the 'restrained' account of the gospel writers and ignore the physicality and emotion of what Christ endured? Are we not physical and emotional (as well as spiritual) beings?

Bishop Hugh tells us that the 'restrained account of the passion' told in the gospels is told objectively. How can any 'restrained' account be objective? Surely this borders on the paradoxical? The gospel accounts we have today are subjective, just as Gibson's film is.

As if criticism of the film is not enough, Bishop Hugh then takes issue with the words of Matthew ('His blood is upon us and upon our

Thank you Southwark

Greetings from St Michael's Primary School! I am the project manager at St

Michael's Church in Khayelitsha.

One of the projects that I will be managing is the primary school. With this in mind, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Bishop of Southwark for his Lent Call for the benefit of St. Michael's Primary School. I am overwhelmed at the amount and believe it will be instrumental in educating many children in Khayelitsha. The money will be used for building of the primary school. At this stage we are buying the

land and finalizing the plans for the school.

Presently we can accommodate pupils up to grade 2. Our vision is to extend to grade 7 by 2009.

I will definitely keep you informed on the progress of the project and how the donation is used.

Once again on behalf of St. Michael's Primary School I would like to take the opportunity to thank you for the donation of £20,000.

Stephen Bonaconsa

Something to say?



Drop us a line at THE BRIDGE. You'll find the address, fax and e-mail details on page 2.

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have ever seen. The characterisation (with the exception of Pilate) was unemotional and soulless. However, I would defend Gibson's right to make poor films and Bishop Hugh's right to avoid them. What I do find difficult is to accept the criticism of any piece of work, where the critic has not engaged with the work concerned. But perhaps that's objectivity for you!

Rev. David Pape, Waterloo

Having seen The Passion of the Christ, I feel I need to respond to Hugh Montefiore's letter on the subject.

I approached the film with some misgivings, having heard similar criticisms.

The film was indeed violent (and to my mind the flagellation scene in particular was grossly OTT) but the strength of Mel Gibson's interpretation was on Christ's conscious and active bearing of his sufferings, rather than being a helpless or fatalistic victim. It begged the question: "Why is he choosing this?" In a similar vein, another particular strength was the portrayal of Jesus' mother, Mary, far from being a stereotypical weeping Madonna, was played as a very strong character, full of faith, who was able to give Jesus emotional and spiritual strength in his darkest hour. I liked this characterisation, both as a positive model of motherhood, but also because Mary is often portrayed in Christian

preaching as an archetypal believer. True believers are not afraid to face the darkness in the lives of others, and whilst suffering alongside them are also able to impart strength.

Likewise, the film gave the strongest characterisation of Simon of Cyrene that I have seen in a Jesus film. We witnessed the subtle journey of faith in a man who, witnessing the way that Christ chose to bear his sufferings, ended up offering both physical and emotional support to Christ on his desolate journey to Calvary.

Which brings me to the alleged anti-Semitism. I have to confess I didn't notice the infamous "let his blood be upon us and upon our children" line in the film, and while the political subtleties of the relationship between the Sanhedrin and Pilate were not adequately portrayed, I didn't find any suggestion that the Jewish people were responsible for the crucifixion.

Simon of Cyrene, Jesus' main companion on the Via Dolorosa is explicitly identified by one of the Roman soldiers as a "Jew", whereas the worst cruelties are incontrovertibly inflicted on Jesus by the Romans. As if to further the point that all are alike in sin and in the mercy of God, Gibson has Jesus praying his famous prayer "Father forgive them" twice - once when the Roman soldiers are nailing him to the cross, and again later when the leaders of his own people mock him when he is on the cross.

Please - no more prejudice about this film. Go and see it and make up your own minds!

Helen Hawthorn, Croydon

Why I don't want to see that film

There are three reasons why I don't



emphasising Christ's spirituality

unhelpful (I speak as one whose ministry has been greatly enhanced by this medium - regardless of their 'correctness').

For Bishop Hugh to go on to say that Jesus' passion was not dramatic but ordinary is an incredible comment. That many other people suffered similar fates makes Jesus' no less dramatic, as were their own deaths.

It is pointed out that the events of Christ's passion were 'epoch-making' only because 'Jesus was not only human but divine.' Bishop Hugh then asks 'How can a film show that?' But surely the very same question could be asked of the written accounts that we have in our gospels?

These were also subject to the 'editorial' considerations of their writers. This does not invalidate the film or its content any more than it invalidates the church's written accounts.

The second point made by Bishop Hugh was that the violence in the film reminded him of mediaeval Catholicism

Parish Profile; St Mary, Bletchingley

I read with interest the Parish Profile of St Mary, Bletchingley, in the May 2004 edition of The Bridge.

It was good to read direct quotations from some of the parishioners but as a Parish Profile, there are a couple of serious omissions.

- there is a Roman Catholic congregation in Bletchingley who hold a 9 am Mass in St Mary's Church on Sunday mornings and there is a strong feeling of common unity between the Anglican and Roman Catholic congregations.

Indeed the clergyman in white vestments seen in front of the church tower in the photograph included in the article is the Roman Catholic minister who took part in a shared service with the Anglicans this year on Palm

Sunday. How many other churches in Southwark Diocese welcome Roman Catholics to hold services in their church?

- the Rector is mentioned many times in the Profile but there is no mention of our two hard working Southwark Pastoral Auxiliaries (SPAs), Valerie Barnes and Ann Pressey and the work they do in the parish. Only one of our two Churchwardens is mentioned by name and no mention is made of the Parochial Church Council (PCC), whose members make great contributions to the well being and smooth running of the parish.

I am neither a Roman Catholic nor a member of the Anglican PCC, but I thought these omissions should be mentioned.

Nigel J Price, Bletchingley

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Support for dyslexic clergy

As a dyslexic ordinand, I am aware that there are no support groups for dyslexic clergy and ordinands and would like to form one.

If others would value an opportunity to share coping strategies, support one another and share information with each other, with training colleges and the Diocese perhaps they would like to email me at patrickorpaula@hotmail.com. If there is sufficient interest I will organise a meeting in the autumn.

Patrick Jordan

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