

The Passion of The Christ

A group of young Christians and Jews from Mortlake and East Sheen saw the controversial Mel Gibson film together - here are some of their views

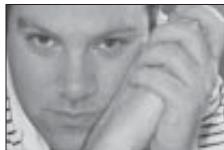
Mark Chesterman writes:

As shown by the huge public reaction, *The Passion of the Christ* is a powerful film.

Whether the reaction is good or bad, it cannot be denied that this film has brought the sensitive subject of Jewish blood-guilt into the wide domain of public discussion. Unfortunately it has done so with a heavy hand, and whether one believes that the film is anti-Semitic or not (which is, as far as I can tell, essentially down to personal opinion), the insensitive handling of this subject has detracted from the message of the film.

It is the other controversial element of the film which enhances the message that is the basis of this story. The brutal treatment of Jesus, and more pertinently His humble acceptance combined with His refusal to be beaten by this wickedness, emphasises the trial that is all too easy for us to forget - the trial of mental and physical torture that Jesus underwent to save those who were doing the torment, and those who have continued to inflict torment through the ages. This is perhaps a lesson

that should not be forgotten in this time of revenge and counter-revenge, and so far this is the only film I have seen that addresses the issue. It may not be a sensitive film, and it may have sparked controversy, but it is important not to discard it for this, as it has so much greater a message to tell.



Adam Blitz writes:

Gibson's film concerns the arrest in Gethsemane, entry to Jerusalem, Proclamation and trial.

There are occasional discursive episodes, but no attention is paid to Jesus' baptism, career or discussion on the subversive nature of Jesus ministry - of whether he transgressed Torah or was within tradition. Quite simply, the viewer is expected to acknowledge the cultic, redemptive nature of Christ's

suffering de facto rather in the same vain that a mediaeval Christian might view contemporaneous Passion plays.

This in itself is not problematic. It is polemical - as are the texts - but it is not without precedent. What is problematic is Gibson's use of "faction", a term used to describe the mixture of fact with fiction. Aramaic and Latin are used to add credence and embellish the plot.

But it is here that Gibson betrays text and tradition notably in the trial scene. Here Pontius Pilate, is seen as a benevolent ruler in a dilemma. The Sanhedrin, on the other hand, are portrayed as caricatures who not only call for crucifixion but witness it at Golgotha.

This is the real controversy - that of judgement and culpability. Where is the justification for Pilate's angst? The evidence for moral consciousness? This is eisegetical. The theme is not new. There is long-tradition of representing Jews as Christ-killers and absolving the Romans, pre-Vatican II.

It disturbs me to think that this film might strengthen someone's faith rather than challenge it. What is left is an ugly, dark film and a mediaeval world-view, nothing more.



William Cowell asks

Is "The Passion of The Christ" a film just too graphic and explicit for its own good, anti-Semitic and the latter an accusation reinforced by its portrayal of Pontius Pilate?

Extremely bestial and violent the film certainly is. We are not spared the horrific torture and beating that Christ endured. But why assume that such bestiality derives from an anti-Semitic agenda? The film's explicitness and graphic

contrast of Christ remaining so humble throughout all the savagery and barbarity produces effects that wouldn't be produced otherwise. Firstly, you come away from it feeling guilty for Jesus' death, and secondly for not fully appreciating all that he went through for the sake of our sins, which exposes yet another, and very timely, discrepancy. That is that we have insulted the Crucifixion through commercialisation and exploitation, causing us to overlook the real pain, purpose and significance of and behind the Crucifixion.

Is the film anti-Semitic? Superficially, critics may have a point here. Pontius Pilate is surprisingly compassionate

towards Jesus handing him reluctantly over to the marauding Jews only to appease them, and implying the Jews were the responsible and guilty culprits behind Christ's death. But it is more a reflection of power and authority corrupting the morals and humanity of those in power and the dangers of failing to stand up against what we know to be wrong, than of any anti-Semitic sentiment.

Gibson is not slanting the Jews in this film. He portrays an anger towards our misconception of the Crucifixion, and towards the tendency of man's integrity and humanity to become corrupted by power.

Voting on 10 June

Bishop Colin writes:

There is no diocesan line on whom you should support in the elections for Mayor of London, for the London Assembly, and for the European Parliament!

This coaching column is not trying to catch your vote in that sense - all I want to do is to help you vote in such ways as to get as near as possible to the outcome you really wanted.

First (if you are in the Greater London area) the election of a mayor. Here you register your first and second choices - but what happens to them? The answer is that, if no candidate has over 50% on the first count (of first preferences), the two with most votes stay in for a second count where votes cast for other candidates are checked to see what the voter's second choice was. Those for the first two are added to their totals.

Last time round Livingstone and Norris got 65% of first choice votes - but only about one in three of those voting for other

candidates had named either as their second choice so, around 375,000 votes (about 24% of all the votes), were discarded.

So here is the honest broker's advice:

(a) If you want Livingstone (for example) elected you put him first. As he is bound to be in the last two, your second preference will never even be inspected. So you can amuse yourself with the Vegetarian or the Flat Earth parties as a second choice if you wish - it will make no difference.

(b) You could actually want a Flat Earth mayor. In that case, you put the FE candidate first, but you would still be wise to think who is likely to be in the run-off of the last two, and cast your second preference *between those two*.

(c) You could simply want a credible alternative to Ken Livingstone. In that case you have to identify in advance which candidate would be most likely to gather anti-Ken votes, and put him (or her) FIRST preference. Why? Well, because you first of all have to ensure that candidate is one of the first two when the first preferences are counted - if you put your Flat Earther first, you are helping defeat your supposedly

credible candidate. But remember, you are caught in tactical voting - that is, you have abandoned all intention of voting for the people you trust best (say the Flat Earthers), and are looking for ways to gain a least-harm-done result.

Of course it is a system flawed to the core, and inevitably means (as with Parliamentary elections) that wise people are driven to try to beat the system. The above advice is how to do it usefully.

Curiously enough, the elections for the Assembly are fairer - for the first-past-the-post vote for constituency members (each constituency in South London is two boroughs), while unfair in itself is corrected by a topping up of parties to true proportions through the party preferences the electors record.

The European elections are impersonally fair and terribly dull - you vote for a party and get a party list result in people elected.

But it is in proportion, and, even if the vegetarians cannot get a member, the Green Party and UK Independence Party each produced representatives last time. So in this election you can vote vegetarian with a real chance of achieving something!

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