

A CRIME OF PASSION

Hear no evil, see no evil, speak no evil
—anonymous source

However people perceive the Mel Gibson movie, "The Passion of Christ," there is universal agreement on its brutality. I won't see the movie, but here is how it is described.

Out of its two hours and seven minutes length, one reviewer counted an hour and 45 minutes of watching a man being tortured to death. Sound and graphics enhance the sensory impact of the torture.

Jesus' backside and front is flogged to a bloody pulp with sticks and barbed cat-o'-nine-tails. While he is being jeered, the thorns of a crown are pressed into his temple causing blood to stream down his face. Then he is whipped some more while he carries the heavy cross. Watchers are treated to every blow of the spikes driven into his limbs; one arm was torn from its socket. Blood is everywhere. The same reviewer called it the equivalent of a slasher movie.

The Romans reserved the cross for their worst offenders. The method inhibits breathing so the victim dies by slow suffocation. Three gospels are in direct agreement about Jesus flogging (scourging). Luke vaguely calls it "chastise," but in a later verse Jesus clarifies what "chastise" meant. The intensity was a product of Gibson's imagination. Some reviewers were skeptical that any human could survive Gibson's portrayal of the flogging.

Then he released for them Barabbas, and having scourged Jesus, delivered him to be crucified. (Matt. 27:26)

So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released for them Barabbas; and having scourged Jesus, he delivered him to be crucified. (Mark 15:15)

I will therefore chastise him and release him." (Luke 23:16)

they will scourge him and kill him, and on the third day he will rise." (Luke 18:33)

Then Pilate took Jesus and scourged him. (John 19:1)

As barbaric as it seems to me, Jesus' suffering has a powerful emotional affect on Christians' love for him. It goes back to John 3:16, "God so loved he world that he gave his only son." They truly feel they owe him a debt of gratitude. For the reasons to follow, I hope there are marginal Christians who might be turned off in disgust.

Let's forget the arguments about the nonexistence of God and Jesus and treat the events of the crucifixion as if they really happened. We'll treat this the way Christian theology tells it, that God the Father sent his Son to atone for the sins of mankind. The most important character doesn't appear in the movie: God.

Let me rephrase John 3:16 a few different ways without the piety. The Creator screwed up, so rather than take personal responsibility he used his son as a scapegoat. Because mankind wasn't living up to his expectations, he took his revenge out on his son by putting him in harms way. A man gets pissed at his wife, so he throws his son in a lion's cage. A man gets fired from his job, so in anger he pushes his son in front of a speeding car. It would be just as dastardly if the son offered to give his life to please his father, and his father assented.

Romanticizing the language doesn't change the nature of the crime. Whether the action is initiated by a god or a human it is the same morality. Simply stated, God took his vindictiveness out on the one he loved the most. The most innocent person was sent to die

because the masses weren't conforming to God's expectations. It reverses the meaning of justice. Christians won't see it this way because they refuse to judge God. Their response is cowardly.

One reviewer preferred the classical movies on Christ because they presented a "positive" message. Billy Graham said "it was our sins that caused his death." A recent email comment I got was that I "haven't imagined why Christians welcomed a horrible death for love of Jesus." Years ago I was stunned when a Christian explained to me how grateful he was because the injustice of Jesus' sacrifice was so extraordinary. Christians see Jesus as the savior who taught and died for them.

And yet the enemy who threatens them is God. This is something we see in political history where a despot is so powerful and vindictive that his subjects are afraid to think questionable thoughts out of fear they might be punished. So out of fear they learn to love him. Compared to God, Hitler doesn't seem so bad.

As a footnote, the sacrifice of children and virgins was not an uncommon practice in primitive cultures. It makes me think: Despite vast technological improvements since biblical days, the human body has hardly changed.

Further reading

[Sacrifice and Jesus](#)