



# Sentinel

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## THE PASSION: DECEPTION OF CHRISTIANS' PERCEPTION?

PASTOR GARY GILLEY

Mel Gibson's movie **The Passion of the Christ** is being welcomed in conservative Christian circles with almost universal acclaim. Some Christian leaders have even said that the film will be the greatest opportunity for evangelism since the crucifixion itself. Perhaps they are correct. From almost all accounts **The Passion of the Christ** is relatively faithful to the biblical record.

But such is not the case. The movie goes far beyond the biblical account, adding not only dramatic license, but much that is found in Roman Catholic tradition and mysticism. This may, or may not, diminish from the overall message of the film, but at the very least it will lead to confusion, especially for those not biblically knowledgeable, as to which events actually took place and which events came from the imagination of the writers and others. A few other scenes are taken from the Gospels, but shown out of sequence. Still, Gibson's goal is to give his viewers a

complete understanding of the sufferings that Christ endured in order to secure our redemption. Without question some unbelievers will be powerfully moved by the film and will seek to know Christ as their Savior. Christians will also be impacted as they witness the tortures of the scourging and the crucifixion. It would seem if there ever was a movie that the evangelical community could support, this would be the one. But is there nothing about the film and its objectives that should give us pause? Is there anything at all that should be examined more closely? Being the "sanctified skeptic" that I am (and unapologetically so since I believe everything in this world is tainted with sin and that Satan is allowed at present to possess incredible power and influence over this world system), I see several red flags waving in the breeze as I think about this movie. Whether or not these flags indicate that **The Passion of the Christ** should not

be viewed and used toward godly ends, they do indicate that we might want to proceed with caution. All is not as it seems.

### A MAN AND HIS MOVIE

Mel Gibson is an ultraconservative Roman Catholic, a traditionalist who does not acknowledge many of the reforms of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965). He favors the Latin mass, does not eat meat on Fridays, believes Mary is co-redemptrix, etc. The actor said that he had drifted from his Catholic roots and found himself in a desperate situation. In order to help himself he started meditating on the stations of the cross, which Catholics use to mark the hours of Christ's passion ("passion" is from the Latin *passus* which means "having suffered"). Gibson in various interviews has said, "I realized that His wounds could heal my wounds.... I got to a very desperate place. Very desperate. Kind of jump-

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*Sentinel* is die lyfblad van **KIES** en word kwartaaliks gepubliseer om die gemeenskap in te lig en te waarsku teen misleiding, die ware Evangelie te verkondig en die Kerk bewus te maak van die gevare wat die dwaalleer van die kultes inhou. *Sentinel* is the mouthpiece of **KIES** and is published quarterly to inform and warn the community against deception, to spread the true Gospel and to alert the Church against the heresy of the cults.

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*Skryfaanhalinge, tensy anders vermeld, is uit die 1983 Afrikaanse Vertaling/Scripture quotations, unless stated otherwise, are from the NASB.*

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## Redaksioneel/Editorial

### THE PASSION

This issue contains two articles of Past Gary Gilley. Both articles were downloaded from website: <http://www.deceptioninthechurch.com>. Other good material about *The Passion* can also be found, among other sites, on <http://www.pawcreek.org>. I have read some of his excellent books. Two worth noting are *This Little Church Went To Market* and *I Just Wanted More Land*.

Since the Mel Gibson film, *The Passion of the Christ*, about Jesus Christ's last 12 hours on earth hit theatres world wide with such impact, I wondered whether I should go and see it. Having read quite a bit of material about the practice of crucifixion in the days of the Romans I fully realise the brutality of this execution method. So, it would not have been for that reason I would have gone. Secondly I fully realise what Jesus did for me on the cross and as such I felt why do I need to see in pictorial form the brutality He had to endure to purchase my freedom?

But is was when articles like these became available on the internet I became aware of the other side of this film and then decided, what's the point!

So, I will be among the few who will not see the movie.

### Subtle deceptive infiltration

In the early eighties *The Toronto Blessing* hit South Africa, then followed, *Gold Fillings and Teeth and Rain*, *Holy Laughter* and the *Alpha Course*, and recently *The Purpose Driven Life* and now it is *The Passion*, with *Transformations* going from strength to strength, or so it seems.

The fact that we do not hear of many of these does not mean they are not with us any longer—they merely have lost their newsworthiness. So we must not think that the subtle deception of churches and Christians have decreased. The opposite is rather true and *The Passion* is the latest

among these wolves in sheeps clothing.

Gary Gilley wrote in his *I Just Wanted More Land*, the following: "...[concerned] believers stand on guard at the gate of the Christian faith, refusing entry to all who directly attack the veracity of the Bible...But sadly, while the front gate is amply defended, someone has left the back gate wide open—and few seem to notice. Flowing through this undefended gate are hoards of issues, theories, approaches, distortions, and sloppy interpretations that undermine the Scriptures as effectively as those who would deny its authority. It is this back gate that concerns us." (xiii,xiv)

It was these words that reiterated to me how deception is creeping into the church. No wonder God says in His Word, "For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?" (1 Pet 4:17)

When I heard of orthodox churches presenting the Alpha course I sent them information to warn them about the possible dangers or negative influences of this course. I recently did the same with the *40 Days of Purpose* courses based on Dr Rick Warren's book, *The Purpose Driven Life*. But to no avail—they went ahead anyway. Some even returned the material I sent them without any comments. I guess its a matter of when a person or institution has made has made up its mind, its and open and shut case.

The same tendencies and progress of events can be noted in the correspondence about Alpha on the letters page.

### A personal matter

I will go into hospital at the end of the month for prostate removal due to cancer, and trust that you will bear me up in prayer. Thank you and God's richest blessings.

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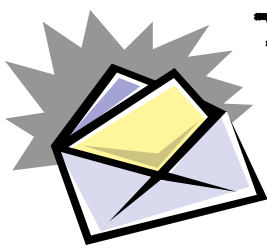
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# Briewe/Letters

## The Alpha course

Hi Anton (E-mail contact & intermediary)

Thank you for sending me the article about Alpha. I do not know who Chris Hand is, so it would not be right to assess why he found it necessary to write such an article but in brief, I believe it is unhelpful to the extension of the gospel to nitpick what is essentially a useful tool to bring people to a position where they understand what it means to be a Christian. He obviously sees it as giving people a wrong understanding of the gospel and so people come to salvation without understanding what they are doing. That depends entirely on who uses it and why they use it. We have used the course effectively, not so much as an evangelism tool as a means to promote discussion on some of the central themes of the Bible. As we have almost daily contact with those with whom we have done the course, the whole deal about being a follower of Jesus is explained.

Much of the criticism that is leveled at the content of the course, seems to be an argument from the silence of what is there rather than what is actually said - that is poor scholarship and the motives of this criticism needs to be gone into. I do see weaknesses in the Alpha course and possibly because of Chris' own theological position, he would not see these- does that make it wrong - no! It is easy for me to go through what he has written and begin to point out many omissions in who he sees God to be - whether my conclusions are valid, is probably questionable.

He concludes by writing - *We must do better*. I personally would welcome an alternative course - I wonder whether he has produced such a course. If he has not, he should reserve criticism of something that, as I see it, God is clearly using to extend His kingdom.

The quicker that we begin as Christians to stop criticising what others are doing to bring the message of Jesus to a dying world the better. Satan and his demons rejoice every time they see that happen. I personally hope that the promised book on the Alpha course does not see the light of day. It will do little to see the kingdom of God extended by bringing people to Jesus, which surely must be a major purpose of being a follower of our wonderful Lord Jesus Christ.

Be blessed in Jesus  
DES

(After a response to the above the following message was received. Ed.)

Anton en Japie  
Have you ever done the Alpha Course? I have!

I praise any method, book or seminar that will lead people to Christ. The Alpha course has been presented in my home and Bible study group and I found nothing insidious about it. I saw people come to Christ and others strengthened in their faith and relationship with Jesus the Messiah.

I will use it again and recommend it to others.

If the people who are so strongly against it put that same energy into actually preaching the good news themselves more people would know the Lord.

Remember that phrase from Paul ... That by any means I may save some ??????

Give the man a brake (*sic!*) he is human and fallible and would probably admit to the same. If you have a problem with him speak to the Lord about it and then do as scripture tells you to do. Get on a plane and confront him personally. Don't send out stuff that will hurt the gospel and Christ's bride the Church. There is enough dissention already. And although in the Gumbel unmasked section the author says he does not want to assassinate Gumbel's character he does and just like Judas, with a kiss (i.e. looking like a brother).

Lets pray for Nicky and praise the Lord for those that have found Christ.

Mark

Dear Anton/Des/Mark

*There is nothing more convincing than personal experience. Whatever the experience was this becomes any person's framework for reference and measuring anything that is being said or written. Is this then what we have here? I have for instance had many intense discussions with Jehovah's Witnesses and other cult members. You cannot or with great difficulty, for instance, using the Bible only!!!, convince a Jehovah's Witness that Jesus Christ is God Almighty or that the Triune God is a Biblical reality—they will not believe you or any other Christian because only their teachers and their organisation have the truth—only their Bible translation is correct. Whatever people decided they want to believe they WILL believe. Unless the Holy Spirit intervenes and grabs the person by the scruff of the neck he will continue to believe what he chose to believe. Witches for instance believe that witchcraft works and will actually show people that casting spells do work. Sangomas (Shamans) actually heal people and even cast out demons. Does the fact that what they do and that it works makes it good?*

*One thing I cannot explain is that when this whole business of gold fillings and rain were at the order of the day; I felt uneasy, or more accurately my spirit felt uneasy with, and*

*about it, so it happened with the Alpha course and more recently with Rick Warren's books, The Purpose Driven Church and The Purpose Driven Life. Wilkinson's The Prayer of Jabez had no less an effect at the time. Now I truly believe I am blessed with not so welcome and so nice a gift, and that is the gift of discernment. Some 12 years ago the Lord gave this to me when I offered myself available to work with and reach, especially Jehovah's Witnesses for Christ. Since then this task has expanded and what really worries me a great deal is the deception, sometimes very subtle and then there is the less subtle deception that is creeping into the Church, very often through highly respected teachers and great Christian leaders, Dr Billy Graham being one of them. The question I have, why would the Holy Spirit make my spirit feel restless and uneasy when something new and subtly deceptive "hits" the church? Years ago I attended a service when the Toronto Blessing had just "hit" the country. From the minute I went into that service, despite all the preamble of praise and worship, I felt troubled in my spirit and had no doubt that the Lord was absent but another lord was present. Since then numerous video material that I have in my possession is convincing proof of its satanic roots. Yet people like Wimber, Howard-Browne, Hinn, Paul Crouch, Copeland and the late John Arnott, to name only a few are for instance hailed as great men of God. TBC is being watched by millions of Christians and in many instances fed a lot of nonsense not to mention the deception through this channel which is hailed as such a blessing by scores of people.*

*I have not done the course! Why? Should I take poison to find out it will kill me, or lie on a railway track to find out that a train won't stop merely because I am lying on the track?*

*I suggest Des and Mark make an effort and obtain the following books: Alpha the official guide Overview and Alpha the official guide World, both by Elizabeth McDonald and Dusty Peterson from:*

*St Matthew Publishing Ltd, 24 Geldart Street, CAMBRIDGE, CB1 2LX, UK*

*Tel: 091-44-1223-504871 Fax: 091-44-1223-512304 Email: PIPEX@dial.pipex.com*

*Then study them and point out all the mistakes, incorrect conclusions and assumptions and character defamation/s (their Judas betrayal of Gumbel) and then take it up with the authors and the publisher and then inform the community or at least you (Anton) and I. I will also gladly publish the outcome of their efforts on our webpage.*

*Do I understand the Bible incorrectly when it summons Christians to judge what other Christians are teaching and to expose the darkness and deception if present or even veiled, even if he is a "brother"?*

*Does I Tim 1:20 cause Des and Mark a problem?*

Ed.

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# THE ROAD TO ROME

Pastor Gary Gilley

As little as twenty years ago it was the overwhelming consensus of Protestant evangelicals and fundamentalists that those who adhered to the Roman Catholic doctrine of justification were not saved. That did not mean that Catholic Christians did not exist, for it was recognized that within the Church of Rome existed regenerate souls who for various reasons had remained in the Catholic Church. But none who clearly understood and accepted the soteriology of Rome could be viewed as born again.

Rome's salvation is sacramental in nature. Salvation, Catholics teach, is by grace, through faith, based on the cross. But to this they add an elaborate system of works which are also necessary for salvation. Still even this is not enough, for final authority for eternal salvation lies in the hands of the Church. All of this, and more, is proof positive that Rome's gospel is not God's and therefore is another gospel (Galatians 1:6-9) and condemned by the Lord.

Following the Roe vs. Wade decision on abortion, Catholics and evangelicals soon found themselves on the same side of many issues: abortion, family, morals, euthanasia, etc. As these two groups mixed, politically and ethically, in what has been termed "an ecumenism of the trenches," it became more and more difficult for evangelicals to view their Catholic friends (with whom they worked side-by-side on some moral issue) as unredeemed. At that point a shift in thinking took place for many, opening a door for recognizing Catholics as brothers and sisters in Christ. Through this door came Chuck Colson, Father John Neuhaus and The Evangelicals and Catholics Together Document of 1992 (ECT). There for the first time in print, at least on a wide popular level, was the declaration and recognition that "devout" Roman Catholics and evangelicals were one in Christ. We



have taken different roads to Christ, to be sure, but somehow we all have arrived at the same place—we are both the children of God. Of course not all accepted this new union and much squawking broke out.

Now here we are a mere twelve years after ECT broke like a bombshell on the Christian world. Today it is considered politically incorrect, insensitive, negative and judgmental to even imply that a practicing Roman Catholic is not saved. We may have separate disciplines and theology, but we are all one family in Christ. In addition, there has been a flight toward Rome by evangelicals. Not only have they embraced more and more Catholic theology, but many are taking the plunge—leaving their Protestant churches and converting to Rome. And through it all, Rome has not budged a bit. Sure, Vatican II allowed for some conciliatory actions by Catholics, and some practical changes, but Rome has not altered even one doctrine. Salvation is still found only in the Roman Catholic Church. At the Council of Trent in the seventeenth century, over 100 anathemas against "heretics" outside the Roman Catholic Church were issued. Not one of the anathemas has ever been retracted.

Now comes the most powerful Roman Catholic propaganda in years in the form of Mel Gibson's movie, *The Passion of the Christ*. This is not an intel-

lectual presentation, like ECT; instead Gibson bypasses the mind altogether and goes straight for the emotions. In Gibson's foreword to the book *The Passion* he writes that the film "is not meant as a historical documentary.... I think of it as contemplative in the sense that one is compelled to remember... in a spiritual way, which cannot be articulated, only experienced...."

Christianity Today admits, "This movie was shaped from start to finish by a devout Roman Catholic and by an almost medieval Catholic vision." [1] And Gibson is clear about his purpose: "The goal of the movie is to shake modern audiences by brashly juxtaposing the sacrifice of the cross with the sacrifice of the altar—which is the same thing." [2]

Should conservative Christians not show some caution before joining hands with a man who is intentionally linking the cross of Calvary with the continual re-sacrificing of Christ in the Mass? Gibson's intention is to immerse people in Roman Catholicism and bring them into the Church. I believe that, due to the power of this film and the lack of discernment by Christian leaders, he may well succeed.

## A ROMAN CATHOLIC MOVIE

Just how Catholic is this film? Examine the evidence. While Gibson follows the general account found in the

Gospels, he freely embellishes the movie through “dramatic license.” There are numerous such cases, most prominent perhaps being the “Satan” character who tempts Jesus throughout the film. Of course, this and dozens of other

from medieval Catholic mystics.

David Neff, while drawing vastly different conclusions than mine, says it well:

“When Protestants talk about prayer, they usually mean talking to God about what is on their heart and asking Him to deal with life’s difficulties. When Catholics talk about prayer, they mean the same things, but they tend to include as well certain practices of contemplation and meditation.... Historian Chris Armstrong describes the medieval origin of cross-centered devotion, which invited the believer to meditate on each separate event of Jesus’ passion and each individual wound on His body.... These practices became the foundation for such widely practiced tradition as meditations on the Five Sorrowful Mysteries when saying the Rosary. The structure of Gibson’s film conforms exactly to the list of the Five Sorrowful Mysteries: The Agony of Jesus in the Garden, the Scourging of Jesus at the Pillar, The Crowning with Thorns, the Carrying the Cross, and the Crucifixion and Death of Jesus. And it reveals the way that this film is for Gibson a kind of prayer.” [3]

In the same issue of *Christianity Today*, church historian Chris Armstrong identifies the sources behind Catholic contemplative prayer—medieval mystics. It was the monks, Armstrong writes, especially the early Irish and British monks, “who sustained a special devotion to the cross of Christ and tried to imitate Christ’s sufferings with penitential disciplines, such as standing for long periods with arms outstretched.... Soon a new atonement theology came on the scene, one fit for the new emotional piety. Its author was Peter Abelard (d.1142/43), who stressed that the crucifixion provided not satisfaction for wrongs committed but rather the supreme example of Christ’s love and forgiveness. Abelard wanted to foster in the unbeliever emotions of horror and godly sorrow when confronted by this death.” [4] While others would carry out Abelard’s vision, it was St. Francis of Assisi who was so consumed with the passion of the Christ that he was supposedly rewarded with the stigmata (the bleeding wounds of Jesus) in 1224. Francis’ disciples would bring the humanity and suffering of Christ into the mainstream of devotion as the laity

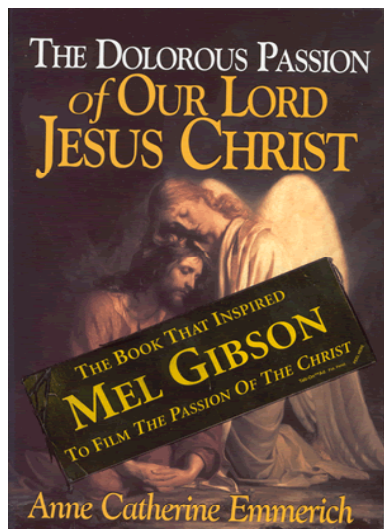
was taught to meditate on the crucifixion. Christians throughout the Middle Ages became absorbed in the passion events.

A Belgian abbot, Rupert of Deutz (d. 1129), “by an allegorical method of exegesis...found in the pages of Job, Psalms, Isaiah, and other books new and little known details of the ‘Secret Passion’ of Christ—the exact number of times He fell down en route to the cross,” etc. [5]

“Late 13th and 14th century authors went one step further with entire comprehensive biographies of Christ that contained details from outside of the Gospels.” [6] These books eventually influenced Ignatius Loyola who “wrote in his widely used *Spiritual Exercises* a set of directions on how to place oneself imaginatively in the scene of Christ’s crucifixion.” This same tradition led to such longstanding devotional practices as the passion play and the Stations of the Cross. And it was in this period that disturbingly graphic crucifixion paintings became much more common.

With this background information it should not be difficult for us to see that it is Medieval Roman Catholic tradition that taught the worshipper to focus on the suffering of the crucifixion, not the Bible. Prior to the second millennium A.D., Christians had little interest in the gruesome details of the Passion. And, of course, in Catholic theology Christ is still suffering for our sins at every celebration of the Mass. It is Roman Catholicism, not Scripture that fixates on the agony and torture of Christ’s death. Scripture does not gloss over the crucifixion but its emphasis is on the outcome, as Christ paid the price for sin and satisfied the holy wrath of God. The Passion of the Christ is a purely Catholic film, propagating Catholic theology and undue emphasis on the grisly details of Calvary. Someone has called it an animated crucifix.

To further emphasize my point, just check out the Catholic ministries such as “Catholic Passion Outreach” (<http://www.evangelism.com/>). There you will find great rejoicing over this movie. At that site you will find a number of downloadable materials promoting Catholic theology, including Rosary related prayers and suggestions for evangelism (i.e. bringing people to Catholicism). They state, “**The Passion of the**



scenes are not found in the Gospels.

But even more alarming is that Gibson adds many details to his film found in the book *Dolorous Passion of Our Lord* written by Sister Anne Catherine Emmerich, a late nineteenth century nun, which contains the visions she claims to have received from God concerning the Passion of Christ. It should be mentioned at this point that the second major doctrine, after soteriology [theology dealing with salvation by Jesus Christ], dividing Catholics from Protestants is that of Scripture. Catholics are quite comfortable with the continuous nature of revelation—that God is revealing truth and insight through select individuals throughout the church age. Much Catholic dogma and practice is based on these visions and revelations. In addition, final authority in Rome does not rest in the Bible but in the Church. Protestants have historically rejected both of these tenets of Catholic bibliology. Gibson, in conjunction with the Roman Catholic Church, feels at liberty to add to Scriptures the vision of this Catholic nun. Surely this should not go unnoticed.

But in order to really understand the heart and soul of **The Passion of the Christ** you must have some comprehension of Roman Catholic methods, meditations and prayers that stem, not from the Bible, or even early Christianity, but

**Passion: From page 1**

out-of-the-window kind of desperate.... And I didn't want to hang around here, but I didn't want to check out. The other side was kind of scary. And I don't like heights, anyway. But when you get to that point where you don't want to live and you don't want to die, it's a desperate horrible place to be. And I just hit my knees. And I had to use 'The Passion of the Christ' to heal my wounds."

Gibson's enthusiasm for Christ's passion appears to be contagious for he claimed that some were saved on the set and a number joined him in daily mass because they felt they needed to be "squeaky clean" to make such a film. The movie is about the last twelve hours of the life of Christ and includes about "twelve seconds," Gibson says, on the resurrection. Gibson believes God called him to make this movie. And while making it he said, "The Holy Ghost was working through me on this film, I was just directing traffic."

The first red flag has to do with Gibson himself. Gibson is a great actor, a likeable character and devoutly religious (at least of late) but there is no indication that he is a true Christian (more on this in just a moment). Given the reality that God can do and use anything to accomplish His purposes, we should nevertheless be somewhat skeptical that He would choose to use an unregenerate man such as Gibson to proclaim the gospel story. It is true that in Scripture God used unbelievers for His purposes, even calling them at times His servants. We can think of Cyrus and Nebuchadnezzar and many others. But I can recall no time when the Lord commissioned an unbeliever to proclaim His infallible truth and call people to salvation. One noteworthy incident germane to our subject is that of the demon-possessed girl in Acts 16:16-18, who followed Paul and his helpers crying out, These men are

bond-servants of the Most High God, who are proclaiming to you the way of salvation. Paul finally became annoyed with her and commanded the demon to come out. Why was Paul irritated—what the girl had to say was true? John MacArthur in his commentary on this passage explains: "This was a subtle and dangerous attack, a bold attempt to infiltrate a deadly tare among the wheat, because what the demon-possessed girl was saying was true. The demon even used biblical terminology.... The father of lies speaks the truth when it suits his purposes.... Some of his most effective and diabolical work is done in the name of Jesus Christ. He often uses a little truth to ensnare people in a false system of religion.



Since the demon-possessed girl was agreeing with the Christian preachers, the natural assumption would be that she was part of their group. She would have then been in a position to do unspeakable harm to the cause of Christ."

Whether this description fits Gibson or not, I find it quite problematic to think that God has called an unbeliever to produce this film. If the Lord wanted to spread the gospel in this format, why did He not use one of His own people? Should we not proceed with extreme caution when the unsaved are attempting to give leadership in spiritual matters?

**GIBSON'S GOSPEL**

Gibson hopes this film "leads everyone who sees it to a saving faith in Christ." He believes that moviegoers will be forced to make a decision about Christ after they leave the theater. This all sounds good and would seem to indicate that if Gibson has this kind of concern for the souls of people, then surely he too is a Christian. But remember Gibson is a Roman Catholic traditionalist in the pre-Vatican II vein. This means that he believes in sacramental or works salvation. To be

sure Roman Catholicism teaches that Christ's death was for the purpose of saving people and Catholicism teaches the necessity of faith in the saving process; however Catholicism does not teach salvation by grace through faith alone in Christ alone. In simplest terms, it teaches that Christ did His part on the Cross, and now we must do our part through the sacraments and various works. Even then, our salvation is never secured this side of death, for we all will come up short of the needed grace to go to heaven. We must then make up for that deficiency in purgatory.

In an interview with the Herald Sun in Australia, Gibson was true to his roots: "There is no salvation for those outside the Church, I believe it.... Put it this way. My wife is a saint. She's a much better person than I am, believes in God, she knows Jesus, she believes in that stuff. And it's not fair if she doesn't make it, she's better than I am. But that is a pronouncement from the chair [by the Pope]. I go with it."

So for Gibson salvation is not found through faith in Christ who died for us on the cross. Salvation is found in the Roman Catholic Church as we join faith with works and become part of the Catholic community. It is a bit of an irony that the evangelicals who are proclaiming Gibson a Christian, and are working so hard to promote his film, are the very ones whom Gibson says are going to hell along with his Episcopalian wife. But more recently Gibson seems to have changed his views. During his February 16<sup>th</sup> Diane Sawyer interview on Primetime he claimed that ultimately everyone is going to "make it," including Muslims and Hindus and all the rest, but the Catholic Church is the direct route. First, he said, "We are all the children of God." Then when pressed Gibson responded, "It is possible for people who are not even Christian to get into the kingdom of heaven. It's just easier [for Catholics] .... I'm saying it's an easier ride." He now seems to have moved from a narrow exclusivism (salvation is found only in the Church) to inclusivism (there are many roads to God and salvation) and perhaps to universalism (all will eventually be saved anyway).

This leads us to the second red

flag— is there not a real danger of Gibson’s film clouding the gospel waters? After viewing the film will not many of those who are impressed seek salvation in Gibson’s Church – a system devoid of the true gospel? If they instead turn to the many evangelical leaders who have embraced Gibson as a brother in Christ, will they not be confused when they are told that salvation is not found in works but in receiving Christ’s grace through faith alone? If this is true, they might then ask, “Why do you believe Gibson to be a Christian? Are you now telling me that there are many ways to come to God?” Inclusivism is becoming all the rage in evangelicalism; I fear that this will be just one more step in that direction.

### ECUMENISM

The recommendations for this film are glowing and widespread:

“I have no doubt that the movie will be one of the greatest evangelistic tools in modern day history. I think people will go to it and then flood into the churches seeking to know the deeper implications of this movie.” Ed Young Jr., Pastor-Area Fellowship Church

“I believe *‘The Passion of The Christ’* may well be one of the most powerful evangelistic tools of the last 100 years, because you have never seen the story of Jesus portrayed this vividly before.” Greg Laurie, Harvest Crusades

“‘The Passion’ will stun audiences and create an incredible appetite for people to know more about Jesus. I urge Christians to invite their spiritually seeking friends to see this movie with them.” Lee Strobel, former atheist and author.

“I can’t tell you how I admire, respect and applaud you. May God give you the blessing you need where you need it most. ‘The Passion’ is an awe-inspiring portrayal of the last hours of Jesus’ life. It is an accurate account of Jesus’ real sufferings for the sins of the whole world. This is not a film anyone should miss.” Dr. Robert Schuller, Crystal Cathedral/Hour of Power

“Everyone should see this movie. It could be Hollywood’s finest achievement to date.” Tim LaHaye,

Tim LaHaye Ministries

“...if they’re critical of the film, they would be critical of the gospel.” Archbishop John Foley, President, Pontifical Council for Social Communications, The Vatican.

What kind of “Christian” event draws praise from conservative to liberals, from charismatics to the Vatican? Should this all but unanimous unity be a cause for praise or caution? Unity within the church is a wonderful and God-honoring thing. But unity must be in purity. We must never compromise the essentials of the faith to hold hands with those who deny cardinal truth. When Paul heard of some who had twisted the gospel message of grace and faith to a works-based perversion, he did not embrace them, but rather he condemned them (Galatians 1:6-10).

Red flag number three is finding this hodgepodge of those who reside under the wide umbrella of Christianity showing enthusiasm and locking arms over the same movie. Robert Schuller’s gospel is not God’s, nor is the Vatican’s. What is being compromised on the part of conservatives to enter into this union? I am sure that some will say that they can use the film as an evangelistic tool without compromise. I trust that is so, but at the very least we need to carefully consider any tool that can be touted by such a variety of religious leaders.

### SCRIPTURE

A mistake that we often make is to begin with some philosophy or event and then turn to the Scriptures to get God’s perspective. When we do this we tend to bring our presuppositions back to the biblical text. A far wiser move is to begin with the Bible and then evaluate all things in light of what the Bible teaches. When we turn to the Word, how do we find it describing the crucifixion?

The passages pertinent to our study would be Matthew 27:26-35; Mark 15:15-24; Luke 23:33; John 19:18 and Isaiah 52:14; 53:4-6. What strikes us in these accounts is the brevity. “He was scourged,” “They crucified Him”, etc. Little space is taken up with the details of the torture of our Lord. A composite of the five passages would look like this:

1. Very little detail is given about the sufferings of Christ
2. Scourging is just mentioned
3. The crucifixion is just mentioned
4. No attempt is made to stir up emotions or graphically describe the death of Christ.
5. The details of the crucifixion are all concerning other issues.

If we follow the biblical storyline, God made no attempt to picture the gruesomeness of the cross. He did not try to draw us to Christ through an understanding of the horrors of scourging or crucifixion. Rather, He focused on the purpose and accomplishments of the cross. Now it is true that the citizens of the first century had a better knowledge of crucifixions and all that went with them than we do today. But God knew that His Word would ultimately reach other generations, such as ours, which lacked first hand experience of such things. And while the Lord does not minimize the horrors of Calvary, He draws our attention within these passages, as well as in the epistles, to the meaning of the cross. Christ died as our substitute; He paid the price of our sin; He accomplished our redemption; He was our propitiation, etc.

So the fourth red flag would be that Scripture does not spend an exorbitant amount of time on the horrors of the cross. Is it appropriate, therefore, for us to concentrate on this? Is the dramatization of Christ’s sufferings the proper biblical emphasis? Or is it rather the emphasis of medieval Catholicism?

### CONCLUSION

This leads us directly to a final, and most concerning red flag. This is a decidedly Roman Catholic film. It has been described by some as an animated crucifix. It is Catholic in theology, emphasis, motivation and purpose. I fear it will further desensitize conservative Christians about the dangers of Rome, and perhaps even lead the ever popular parade back to Rome. I am very concerned about the influences this movie might have on Christians.

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**Christ** offers an unprecedented cultural opportunity for you to spread, strengthen, and share the Catholic Faith....”

At this site, and at many others, you can order, *A Guide to the Passion: 100 Questions about the Passion of the Christ* written by Catholic Exchange. In the introduction you get a clear picture of the purpose of the movie:

“As someone involved in the distribution and marketing of the film, I noticed early on the fervor with which many Protestant communities were preparing to use the film for evangelistic purposes. Websites sprang up featuring downloadable materials about Jesus and the Gospels. Marketing companies began churning out posters and flyers promoting the film and their own faith communities. Tracts poured into circulation making the case for Christ as the key to peace and happiness in life.

Yet, for all the sophisticated evangelization strategies, the irony is that our protestant brothers and sisters cannot adequately speak to many of the issues and questions the film evokes because the film is so distinctly Marian, so – obviously Eucharistic, so quintessentially Catholic—as is the New Testament itself. In terms of effecting conversions and motivating people to weed out sin from their lives – which is what meditating on the Passion of Christ is all about—our evangelical friends have been an inspiration. But can their theology adequately or honestly mine such cinematic gems as the Last Supper flashbacks? Though the founders of some of the prominent Protestant denominations believed in and adored the Blessed Sacrament, this fact has been lost today in huge portions of American Protestantism. And without an understanding of Mary as our model in true Christian faith, one cannot begin to understand her significant role in the film. Only a solid understanding of the Catholic Faith can help us grasp these essential elements that figure so prominently in both the Scriptural record and the apostolic Tradition.”

The film quite accurately links the

sacrifice of the cross with the sacrifice of the Mass. In doing so, it faithfully depicts biblical and Catholic teaching. Yet the Eucharistic connections between the Passion and the Mass are not obvious to many Catholics today. Indeed, speaking out of my own experience as a clueless Catholic ten years ago, I can only say that it’s highly unlikely that such connections are obvious even to those who have been born and raised in the Church. This is not because the connections are not there, but because so many people have not received an education in the Faith that equips them to see those connections, which are quite real and are, in fact, delineated for us in the teaching of the Church. Therefore, we at CatholicExchange.com see a need for this book to provide answers to some of the many questions critical to a full understanding of authentic Christianity – questions **The Passion of the Christ** will most certainly raise.

#### **EFFECT**

One cannot help but wonder why conservative Protestants are now so drawn to Medieval Catholic mysticism. Because this theology is now in cinematic form, does that change the fact that it is unbiblical? Why have evangelicals not been unduly tempted by this kind of mysticism before but are now? What has changed, and will the net result be that more people are drawn to Rome than to Christ? Do we now believe that Gibson, representing Catholicism, has taught us a thing or two about prayer and worship? Before we go that far we might note that Catholics have been praying the Rosary, meditating on the Stations of the Cross, weeping at the pictures and icon of Christ, entering into His sufferings, and participating at His continuous death at the Mass for centuries. And yet these well-meaning souls are lost. No one is saved by such mystical and misguided methodologies.

#### **CONCLUSION**

Let us end where it began. My concern here has been that **The Passion of the Christ** is another giant step towards Rome. As millions who have never before been exposed to Catho-

lic theology and meditative mysticism find themselves enthralled with Gibson’s film, will they not want more of the same? Once having tasted, will they not want to enter into Christ’s passion more often—as their Catholic friends do through the Rosary, the Mass, and other mystical experiences? I fear so. In the two articles I cited from *Christianity Today* which prove the Catholicity of this movie, the authors both end, if not in Rome, then very sympathetic. While Gibson is amazed that evangelicals have responded to this movie because it is “so Marian,” [7] Neff states, “Many traditional Christians (both Catholic and Protestant) will see this film and feel Gibson has sprinkled them with the saving blood just as the Israelite priests sprinkled the atoning blood on the altar.” [8] And Armstrong pulls together his historical documentation of Catholic mysticism with these words, “But you don’t have to be a charismatic to awaken your imagination and your sense in devotion to Christ. Those who feel a lack in that area could do worse than take Mel Gibson’s cue, and begin a time-traveled ‘spiritual research trip’ to the roots of cross-centered piety.” [9]

What these men are saying is that while they recognize the film is grounded in medieval Catholic mysticism and tradition, it might very well do us evangelicals some good to adopt some of these practices. By doing so they choose to ignore the fact that Gibson is reviving hopeless and damning ritual that may give the feeling of religion, but saves no one.

#### **Footnotes:**

[1] David Neff, “The Passion of Mel Gibson,” *Christianity Today*, March 2004, p. 30.

[2] Terry Mattingly, “The Passion of Mel Gibson,” *Scripps Howard News Service*, January 21, 2004.

[3] Neff, pp. 34-35

[4] Chris Armstrong, “The Fountain Fill’d with Blood,” *Christianity Today*, March 2004, pp. 42-43.

[5] *Ibid*, p. 43.

[6] *Ibid*, p. 43.

[7] David Neff, “Mel, Mary, and Mothers,” *Christianity Today*, March 2004, p. 34.

[8] Neff, p. 35.

[9] Armstrong, p. 44.

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