

Publishing Editor's column

THE FACT that the Australian actor Mel Gibson was producing a film about the crucifixion of Jesus Christ has been the subject of comment for years, but its eventual appearance has provoked widespread comment for two reasons: firstly, its graphic portrayal of the sufferings of Christ; secondly, its alleged anti-Semitism. Before commenting on these two points, however, it is as well to point out that, although supposedly sticking closely to the Biblical story, the film actually does not. The scenes in the film are not only based on the Gospel accounts of the crucifixion, but are embellished by material taken from Roman Catholic legends that have no basis in Scripture, and in the background of the scenes is a figure representing the devil. Moreover, the film is completely unbalanced in its treatment of Scripture, with very little about the all-important resurrection that followed the crucifixion. And is there not something highly distasteful in the fact that vast sums of money are being made from this portrayal of our Lord's sufferings?

Enormous numbers of churchgoers in the USA have flocked to see the film, but at the time of writing it remains to be seen whether this will be so in Britain. Is it something we should all see to remind ourselves of the terrible sufferings Christ endured on the cross for our sakes? The accounts of those who have been to see it speak of it being relentlessly violent; one hardened film critic referred to it as the most violent film he has ever seen, and he could scarcely bear to watch it. Yet the Gospels are very terse in their accounts of the trial and crucifixion. Though we must never lose sight of what the Lord went through; and though a disciplined use of the imagination in thinking just what it was like to be savagely flogged, then crucified, is appropriate; if God had intended us to dwell upon these events in the manner that the film does He would surely have revealed more in His Word.

As to whether the film is anti-Semitic, a wide variety of views has been expressed, though most Jews think it is. This is an area where it is difficult to express a view without having seen the film. However, the chief basis for the charge of anti-Semitism is that the Jews are portrayed as responsible for the death of Jesus. The simple truth of Scripture is, however, that they were. Jesus was crucified because the Jewish leaders wanted to get rid of him, and they were supported in their attempts to have him crucified by a crowd of the common people. Protests about the anti-Semitic nature of the film have generally been accompanied by assertions that the Gospels are biased against the Jews, an unthinkable idea to those who accept them as the inspired Word of God.

Jewish fears that the film will provoke anti-Semitic acts are justified, however, because the Jewish role in the crucifixion has been used to justify acts of anti-Semitism down the ages, though this is something which no true Bible believer would do. The film may thus stimulate the already growing anti-Semitism in many parts of the world, notably in Europe, and this growing anti-Semitism is surely helping to create the situation in which the nations will combine together to invade God's land.

Tony Benson

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