

On the Passion of the Christ, II

5. “Christ’s worst suffering was not physical, but spiritual. The movie dwells too much on the physical suffering.”

I think it unwise to try and determine if His mental suffering was worse than His physical. The mental anguish He suffered was great, especially culminating in “My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?” But to say that his mental suffering was worse? I don’t know of any of the saints who think like that, and the Father’s don’t talk that way. I just know that if you smash your thumb with a hammer, it *really* hurts.

And the notion that His being the Son of God means that He can “take it” better than others, and that it thus lessens the suffering is quite foolish. His divinity did not lessen the suffering, it increased it.

6. “The violence of the crucifixion scene was over-the-top.”

Seneca called crucifixion the most horrible of all deaths. Scourging was done sometimes to reduce the length of time it took to die by crucifixion, by leaving the man just short of dead. It was a very slow way of dying, which came from asphyxiation. Try to use a bicycle air pump with only one hand and without an anchor, and only a little air goes through. The particular pressure placed on the diaphragm from being hung by the arms makes the breathing so difficult. If the victim was intended to suffer more, then his feet would be nailed to the cross, so it would take longer to die. That way the diaphragm has something from which to push off.

Crucifixion was a common form of execution for non-citizens of the Empire, used primarily to strike fear into a populace, or to help subjugate an area (Caesar used it often in the Gallic Wars). There were instances where it was used as a wide-scale punishment. The execution of Spartacus’ followers terrified every Roman slave. In the same way it was used thousands of times during the two great revolts of Judea. During the fall of Jerusalem (70 A.D.), the Romans built a wall around the city. Any Jew attempting to enter or leave without Roman approval was crucified. Eventually most of the city was encircled with rotting corpses (Josephus is very explicit in his description of this).

Passover was a noted time of rebellions, so the crucifixion of our Lord would have been done (I think) in a manner to make it very, very obvious to the populace. Many religious leaders suffered greatly at the hands of the Romans, such as Rabbi Akiva ben Yosef, who was flayed alive like St. Bartholomew. Others according to Josephus were burned alive, but surrounded by wool soaked in water to extend the suffering.

So I don’t know if the criticism of the crucifixion scene was too much. But from what I’ve read in ancient sources, it sure seems plausible to me.

One other note about the soldiers; apparently it was thought of as lousy duty, which most of them could hardly stand. They didn’t enjoy the work, and usually were drunk to do it. This was the same with Nazi’s, even the SS, who had to drink to excess to do their murdering.

For more information about the Roman army at the time, and the whole of the ancient

world, I like the website www.livius.org. I find their research quite good.

7. “Gibson always puts homosexual villains in his movies because of his anti-gay positions.”

I saw the film *Braveheart*, which is spoken of in this context, and it seems to me that it goes against this thought. Longshanks is obviously heterosexual, and he is the real villain in that famous scene of defenestration. The son is obviously homosexual, but he is more of acquiescent whelp, and not some full-fledged villain.

Satan in the *Passion* appears to me to be androgynous, not ‘gay.’ He is portrayed without effeminacy, or any of the typical homosexual speech patterns. He is made to appear androgynous, so as not to implicate evil as being either strictly masculine or feminine, which is a good solution. Gibson explains this in his interview with Diane Sawyer.

Herod appears as a libertine, or an epicurean (or epicene if you like). He is portrayed as a stereotypically decadent potentate, not at all necessarily homosexual. Besides, he was excited by Salome’s dance.

8. “Gibson’s anti-Semitism was one of the factors that made this film happen.”

His dad is a notorious anti-Semite. But there is no evidence that that Gibson’s own prejudices (whatever they are) factored into the making of the film. I think some quotes from the interview with Diane Sawyer should put this to rest:

Sawyer: “Gibson insisted he is no anti-Semite, and that anti-Semitism is “un-Christian” and a sin that “goes against the tenets of my faith.”

He raised some eyebrows with published statements about Holocaust victims being among the many victims of WWII (a completely reasonable and true statement). He told Sawyer that he did not mean to deny that the Holocaust occurred or that there were millions killed.

Gibson: “Do I believe that there were concentration camps where defenseless and innocent Jews died cruelly under the Nazi regime? Of course I do; absolutely. It was an atrocity of monumental proportion.”

Sawyer: “And you believe there were millions, six million?”

Gibson: “Sure.”

I think the film does a great service to the cause of our Lord. There is not a character in the film in whom we cannot see ourselves to some extent. And if Gibson chose not to stick strictly to the Gospels, but relied on things like the work of Blessed Mary of Agreda, plus some artistic license, then we must allow the artist to express his emphases as he best sees fit, like the unnaturally elongated limbs of Our Lord and the saints in the paintings of El Greco.