

# The passion of the christ essay



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Some of the most famous and infamous Interpretations of religion have stemmed from the media. Such media Interpretations lead to questions surrounding the importance and consequences of such presentations and how they impact greater religious discussions.

In this paper I will start by identifying prominent Christian authors and some of the religious debates they address in their writings. Will follow by addressing the lack of discussion surrounding how media, specifically movies, affect religious debate and why such a discussion is important.

I will examine Mel Gibson's controversial 2004 movie *The Passion of the Christ* and analyze its Interpretation of the Gospel and other religious texts in relationship to the movie portrayal of the last hours of Jesus Christ's life. Will conclude by surmising why *The Passion of the Christ* is a model case in media interpretation of religion and why such interpretations can be problematic in how they relate to greater religious discussion.

State of the Debate 2 In examining the current state of Christian debates it is important to examine two of the most heated topics being discussed by some of the most prominent authors of our time. The first of these two debates relates to biblical Interpretation and how biblical interpretations affect a person's religious identity. The second debate discusses whether one's religious identity or religious actions should play into other, more secular, arenas of their life.

Authors Kristin Swenson and Timothy Bella both write about biblical Interpretation and its place in society.

Both Swenson and Bella agree In their respective works Bible Babel and The Rise and Fall of the Bible, that taking the bible literally in the modern world is quite foolish. Bella asserts that consumerism is “ stretching” the word of the bible and the ideas presented taking the bible to it’s “ breaking points” (Bella 21 However, Bella Likes this. He feels It is necessary In order o approach the bible in new and relevant ways.

Kristin Swenson feels similarly, however she approaches the subject of biblical interpretation and its place in today’s culture by providing her readers with a background of the bible in an attempt “ to help readers understand and evaluate for themselves biblical references; and to appreciate how people can get so riled up about It” (Swenson WI). The second debate discusses religious identity, religious action, and their purposes his views of whether or not one’s Christian identity should permeate into the secular aspects of their life in his book A Christian Manifesto.

Schaeffer cannot understand why devote Christians would ever attempt to separate their religious life from their secular societal life.

He asserts, “ Christianity is not Just a series of truths but Truth-? Truth about all of reality. And the holding of that Truth intellectually-? and then in some poor way 3 living upon that Truth, the Truth of what is-? brings forth not only certain personal results, but also governmental and legal results” (Shaffer 20). Conversely, Bill Meyers, a veteran Journalist, strongly believes that there should be a clear separation of church and state.

In his book *Meyers on Democracy* Meyers asserts his concern regarding the vigor with which people attach their religious views to their political views.

He uses the religious “ Right” as an example stating “ the religious Right has become the base of one of America’s great political parties and is using God as a battering ram on almost every issue: crime and punishment, foreign policy, health care, taxation, energy regulation, and social services” (Meyers, 370).

He says” we must not fear taking up a robust and principled defense of secular politics against those forces that seek a monopoly over the public square” (Meyers, 376). The topics of Christian identity and biblical interpretation go hand in hand because how one interprets the bible will affect the shaping of their religious identity and conversely the acts they might commit in the name of their religion. While these two topics alone do not encompass the entire state of current Christian debates, they are two of the most prominent and heated into today’s world.

Where’s the Gap and Why is it Important? The authors summarized and referenced above are highly influential and pull from their knowledge of religious texts, teachings, and writings. I propose, however, that their discussions regarding biblical interpretation and the place of religious identity in politics do not derive enough of their evidence from sources utilized by the greater public.

A 2011 marketer survey concluded that the average adult in the United States spends a total of 11 hours and 33 minutes a day browsing, scrolling, reading, and watching media outlets. These outlets include TV’s shows and

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videos, internet sources, radio, mobile phones, newspapers, and magazines. Seeing as the average US adult spends 48% interacting with media sources then one can conclude that it is from these sources that they are gaining information about subjects from them. In many instances media sources are the only contact some have with different topics, such as religions. That means that people's understandings of religion, its people, its practices, and the conflicts that surround it stem from how it is portrayed in the media.

What happens when this sole contact turns into the foundation for one's position when they enter into a larger conversation concerning a religious matter? In the following case examining Mel Gibson's *Passion of the Christ*, a media interpretation can be shown to be harmful and clouding to a broader conversation.

*The Passion of the Christ: A Background* A useful case for understanding the harmful relationship between media interpretation of religion and broader religious conversations is the film *The Passion of the Christ*, written by Benedict Fitzgerald and Mel Gibson, and directed by Mel Gibson.

The controversial film was released in the United States on Ash Wednesday, February 25, 2004. The R-rated film focuses on the last day of Jesus' life, from his betrayal in the Garden of Gethsemane, his trial and conviction, and his scourging, to his ultimate crucifixion. In Christianity, such a depiction of the last 12-hours of Jesus Christ's life is referred to as Christ's "Passion." In an attempt to stay true to the historical happenings at the time the characters in *The Passion of the Christ* speak in the ancient languages of Aramaic and "street Latin."

3 The film itself was shot entirely in Italy and “ forty percent of the film was shot at night or indoors under wraps in order to get an effect of light fighting its way out of darkness. “ 3 The film attracted controversial attention even before its release and since it was not backed by any major movie corporation the film industry pegged Gibbon’s project as a flop. The film’s initial controversy stemmed from its gory scenes of violence and obvious anti-Semitic sentiments.

Nevertheless, *The Passion of the Christ* attracted throngs of people, from various Christian faiths and ethnic and cultural backgrounds from places all around the world. Much of the film’s success stemmed from fanatical support from churches and fervent Christians who flocked to the theatre to see what they viewed “ as one of the greatest evangelistic tools in history.

L A good percentage of the movie’s patrons were also curious consumers hoping to behold for themselves the controversial scenes of violence and anti-Semitism.

As a film predicted to end the career of actor turned director Mel Gibson, the movie shocked the world by netting some 600 million dollars and “ becoming the eighth highest-grossing domestic film of all-time. “ I As disputed as the movie’s release was, the nature of how the movie’s screenplay was derived and how the screenplay translated to the audience is also just as contentious. *The Passion of the Christ: The Text* The Passion refers to the sufferings of Christ between the night of the Last Supper and his death.

However, there are disparate views on whether or not “ *The Passion* ” should begin with the Last Supper or with Jesus’ betrayal in the Garden of

Statement (wry. Merriam-Webster. Com) 6 As Mel Gibson traveled the circuit, promoting his movie before, during, and after its he drew inspiration from while writing and directing the film. However, further investigation concludes that this is not true.

While Mel Gibson never claimed his movie was historically accurate, he did cite that his aim was to make the movie as true to the gospels as possible.

When asked “ How do you find the balance between staying true to Scripture and your creative interpretation? ” Gibson replied, “ Wow, the Scriptures are the Scriptures-? I mean they’re unchangeable, although many people try to change them. And I think that my first duty is to be as faithful as possible in telling story so that it doesn’t contradict the scriptures. ” (Webb, 2).

Following the release of the movie, Gibson was forced to allude to another text from which he claims he drew “ filler. ” This other text is the controversial book *The Dolorous Passion of Our Lord*.

While the German text does not outright contradict the Gospels as Gibson points out, the images chronicled in the text are so graphic, violent, and detailed in nature that they dispute the writings of the Gospel. While the main thread of the story remains the same in both the Gospels and the *Dolorous Passion of our Lord*, the stark difference in details and exposition lends itself to a completely other narrative that speaks to a more violent, unforgiving, and bloody Passion. Anne Catherine Numeric is the “ blessed ” nun whose visions constitute *The Dolorous Passions of Our Lord*. She was born to poor German peasants 1774.

From an early age she showed interest in the divine and pious life attributed to nuns. Numeric 7 was blessed with what many called "spiritual gifts." She claimed to have many "visions" of Christ, specifically visions relating to The Passion of Christ. At 38 it is recorded that she had stigmata, or marks corresponding to those left on Jesus' body by the Crucifixion. Empiric's visions were compiled by famed poet Clemens Aberrant (1778-1842) and turned into the book entitled The Dolorous Passion of Our Lord. The book provides detailed insight into Jesus' passion through the eyes of Numeric.

The text The Dolorous Passion of Our Lord, is believed by historians and renown theologians to be to "exaggerated and embellished," similar to the poetic style of the poet who took down the visions. This controversial narrative of the last hours of Jesus Christ' is hyper violent and highly anti-Semitic. It is directly from this text that Mel Gibson finds the majority of the textual evidence used in his production. It is easy to pinpoint the moments in the movie that derive their existence from the scions of Anne Numeric and not the gospel, such as the prolonged scenes of violence, some of which were dubbed "Christian Porn. No where in the gospels do evangelists, Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John, discuss, in as grand detail as the movie depicts, the violent beatings Jesus was forced to endure under Jewish leaders and later Roman guards. Conversely in The Dolorous Passion of Our Lord, the scourging of Christ is heavily delineated, as it was in one of the movie's most controversial scenes.

The violent scene goes on for almost ten minuets, leaving a barely alive Jesus in a mammoth pile of blood. Drunken Roman soldiers stand around waiting for more. ND ferocious sentiment that the movie does. 8 While there



are references of anti-Semitism in the New Testament, the movie's anti-Semitic sentiments reached new heights, taking inspiration from the nature of Empiric's visions. Before the film's mainstream release, however, the movie's editors cut many of the particularly controversial anti-Semitic scenes. For instance, producers cut a scene originally early in the movie where an old Jewish man forebodingly fashions the cross for Jesus' later crucifixion.

Even still, it appears as though Jesus' trial was promoted and highly influenced by the Jews. Even though the Gospels reference that the Jewish leaders were the ones who initially arrested Jesus and took him to Pilate, but they do not discuss the machinations of the Jewish leaders as they are portrayed in the movie. The movie depicts the Jewish leaders of the community deluding the crowds forcing Pilate, the fifth prefect of Judea, to listen to the crowd's demands, pardon known serial killer and condemn Jesus.

The movie portrays the Jews as bloodthirsty savages who will stop at nothing to have Jesus killed. It portrays Pilate, contradictory to the Bible, as a suffering and compassionate saint. Apart from its biblical inaccuracy, such a scene is also grossly historically inaccurate for crucifixion was a Roman punishment and the insinuation that the Jewish community was directly complicit, if not almost mostly completely solely complicit, in the concept of crucifixion as a punishment.

Both, the extreme violence and the "in-your-face" anti-Semitism that are witnessed in Gibbon's movie are primarily gleaned from the visions of Anne Catherine Emmerich, not from the biblical gospels.

The Passion of the Christ: Interpretation, Response, and Action Issues with The Passion of the Christ arise when viewers, religious or not, “[perceive] that what they are seeing [on the screen] is ‘ accurate’ to something else-? whether to the Gospels or to history... This unfortunate misconception needs to be corrected” (Sorely, & Webb 173).

Some viewers of Gibbon’s movie, a number of who were highly revered, did take much of the content of the movie as fact. For example “ Ted Haggard, President of the National Association of Evangelicals, said in an interview, This film is probably the most accurate film historically than anything that’s ever been made in the English world...

So we had no hesitations. We were watching it for biblical accuracy and we thought it was as close as close as you can get” (Sorely , 3).

The Vatican Cardinal Castration Hoys, Worldwide Prefect of the Clergy stated “ Mel Gibson not only closely follows the narrative of the Gospels, giving the view a new appreciation for those biblical passages, but his artistic choices also make the film faithful to the meaning of the Gospels, as understood by the Church” (Sorely & ebb, 3). , 3). Such quotes show the vitality with which church superiors glorified the content of the film. Such comments advertise that these salient Christian figures found 10 nothing wrong with the violence and anti-Semitism.

The comments popularized the movie and audience members responded. A survey conducted by the Barn Group the summer following the movie’s release and found that that 10% of moviegoers “ said that the film inspired them to change at least one aspect of their faith. “ 6 Their study essentially

concluded, “ The Passion of the Christ was not a movie but a cultural honeymoon. “ 6 While misplaced interpretations of a movie like Passion of the Christ are damaging on their own, even worse is when viewers of the movie take their misinformation and enter into conversations of religious debate.

Such an event occurred when the United States Air Force Academes administration decided to put “ 4, 400 cadets and 6, 000 staff’ under “ tremendous pressure” to view a showing of Gibbon’s movie.

What happened however was that cadets in the Air Force Academy took the sentiments, specifically the anti-Semitic sentiments and entered into a larger ND more boisterous conversation, specifically the on going and historically tendentious conversation regarding the Jewish community’s collusion in the crucifixion of Jesus Christ.

Following the movie’s presentation a young Jewish cadet named Casey Weinstein alerted his father, also a graduate of the United States Air Force Academy, saying that he was very troubled citing that since the movie’s release he had been called a “ bucking Jew” by numerous people up and down the chain of command at numerous places around the Academy. ” He said that he and “ his” Jewish people were being completely blamed in the execution of Jesus Christ. Weinstein father was so appalled that he alerted the Academes administration. When the administration did little to atone for it’s decision to show the b The Barn Group is a research group located in Ventura, California who focuses their research on the “ intersection of faith and culture.

" 11 controversial movie or punish those involved in the harassment of Jewish cadets, Senior Weinstein founded the Military Religious Freedom Foundation.

If such a movie is being promoted to cadets by their superiors, then cadets come to the conclusion that their superiors believe in the images, attitudes, and sentiments depicted in the movie; and if such images, attitudes, and sentiments are accepted by superiors, and since cadets trust their superiors, government military, and leaders in matters of war and death then why on earth should they not trust such officers regarding a mere movie?

The Passion of the Christ is only one movie, one depiction of one production team's interpretation of religious texts, but the movie's one depiction reached millions taken by those cadets who raged against fellow Jewish cadets show how one movie's interpretation can impact a larger religious conversation with inappropriate and ill-informed attitudes. Conclusion In conclusion, one media's interpretation of religion can be harmful and clouding to a broader conversation because it lends itself to only one side of an issue or topic.

In the case of the film The Passion of the Christ, many viewers of Mel Gibson's movie took what they saw on the screen as biblical fact, when in reality Gibson's interpretation relied heavily on a lesser known, contentious, hyper violent and, highly anti-Semitic work: Dolorous Passion of our Lord. In an incident that occurred allowing a highly publicized showing of The Passion of the Christ at the United States Air Force Academy, Christian cadets and administrators used the movie's anti-Semitic attitudes as an excuse to bully 12 and intimidate fellow Jewish cadets.