

## **Mel Gibson's Passion of Blood and Guilt**

Review of *The Passion of the Christ*, directed by Mel Gibson

By Jerry Harris

First let me admit to bias. I'm an atheist, as were my parents, and also my grandparents. For me praying to God makes about the same sense as asking Odin for guidance. Another confession, my family is Jewish. I don't want to insult anyone with this review, but fair warning is given.

Gibson's *Passion of Christ* explained to me what it means to be "God fearing." I've certainly seen images of Christ covered with blood. I remember being in a Catholic Church looking at a particularly gruesome carving of Christ on the cross and overhearing a father gently tell his young son "this is God." But Gibson has convinced me that Christianity has a rather sick psychological connection with sado-masochism steeped in fear, guilt and torture.

There has to be an element of self-loathing to build a religion around guilt as such a central element. Gibson filmed his own hand as driving the stake into the palm of Christ. Christ died for our sins, was tortured for our sins, God gave his own son for our sins; we carry this guilt with us today and so must love God to forgive our sins. If this isn't masochism I don't know what is. This deep emotional connection to physical torture with the image of a flayed bloodied and torn body offered for devotion. The cross itself is a symbol of an instrument of death. It would be a bit like a communist wearing a small model of the electric chair around their necks after the execution of Ethel and Julius Rosenberg. Of course guilt makes one subservient, obedient and devoted to authority. No wonder Catholics ended-up with the Vatican.

But if Catholics have a corner on guilt the Protestant side of Christianity seems to dwell more on the sadistic character of the religion. There is a certain arrogance that comes from believing only your God suffered such horrible torture. Afterall the Romans crucified and tortured 12,000 ex-slaves when Spartacus was defeated and the CIA has devised equally horrific tortures for the slave rebellions of the modern era. And the whole thing about eating the body of Christ and drinking his blood, well you've got to admit that is a bit creepy. Afterall how many people viewing the *Passion* didn't just for a brief secret moment want to be a Roman more than a Christian.

I can't help sense a connection between the fascination with death, fear and pain in Gibson's film and the "shock and awe" campaign of fear and death launched by the Christians who occupied the White House. Only through Christ can you find your way to God and all else is false. And if you don't accept this God or ignore His worship you will learn to fear Him. Is it such a far stretch to take this attitude to Iraq? Only through America will you learn how to be a modern civilized democratic people, and you must accept our way as the only true path. If not you are an "evil-doer" who will learn to fear America, this "God fearing" nation that will rein down upon you our might so you can learn to obey and stay on the path of righteousness. You may think I'm pushing the point a bit too far here. But consider George W. Bush and the fundamentalism that drives his understanding of the world and his belief in his own role and mission.

There is of course another side to the religion that is based on love and devotion to making the world a better place for all. Liberation Theology has motivated many of the very best activists in

the world. But I have to admit, after viewing this film I'm really glad about the separation of church and state in our constitution.