



SHOWTIME FOR THE SHEEP?

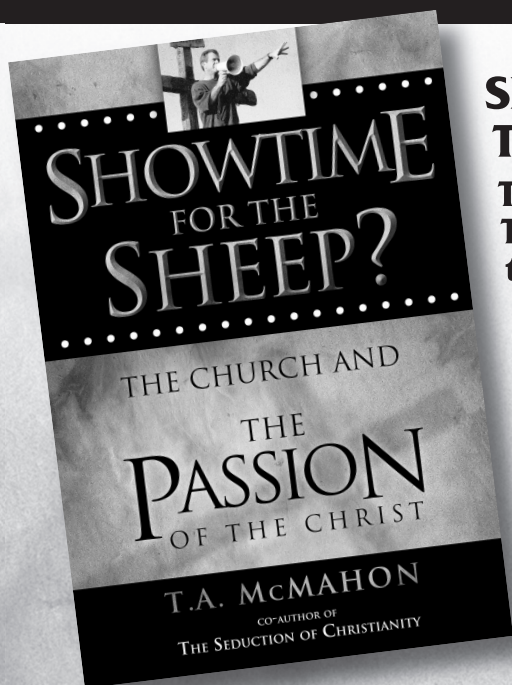
PROBLEMS WITH THE PASSION

“For evangelicals, the film has given them a glimpse inside the Catholic soul, even the traditional Catholic soul. Many evangelicals, reflecting on what they saw in the movie, say they are beginning to “get” the whole Catholic thing: Lent...the ashes on the forehead...no meat on Friday...the sorrowful mysteries...the Stations of the Cross...the emphasis on the Eucharist...the devotion to Mary...the enormous crucifix hanging above every Catholic altar. They may not be rushing out to buy rosaries, necessarily, but some of the things no longer seem so strange, so alien” (ellipses in the original).

—INSIDE THE VATICAN, *March-April 2004*, p.24

BIBLE AT THE BOX OFFICE?

A Berean's Response to Bible Movie Mania



SHOWTIME FOR THE SHEEP?

The Church and The Passion of the Christ

by T.A. McMahon

B60134

5 x 7, paperback, 160 pages

\$10 single copy

\$8 @ 2 or more copies

Available also as an eBook at www.thebereancall.org

Case Quantity Discount

60% off (\$5.18 each!)

Call for details.

ARE WE SINCERELY SEEKING THE TRUE SHEPHERD? ...OR SIMPLY FOLLOWING THE FLOCK?

IS MEL GIBSON'S BLOCKBUSTER movie inspired of God? Have silver-screen portrayals of biblical epics become the new "silver bullet" of evangelism? While *Showtime for the Sheep?* addresses these questions with eye-opening insights, it is far more than a revelation regarding *The Passion of the Christ*. This block-busting little book addresses several key trends that are storming the church in this media-mesmerized millenium:



The increasing use of entertainment and amusement to teach the Word of God—and expanding efforts to make the Gospel message more "seeker-sensitive"



The advancing cause of ecumenism over evangelism—and the resultant confusion between Catholicism and biblical Christianity



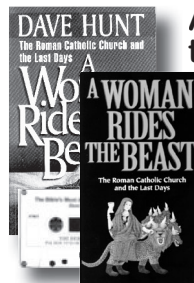
The multiplying effect of doctrinal error through increasingly popular paraphrased "Bibles"—and the proliferation of visual interpretations of Scripture

The Berean Call's executive director, T.A. McMahon, calls the shepherds and the sheep of Christ to reconsider their rush into media-driven ways of doing church in light of God's ways: "For he is our God; and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand. To day if ye hear his voice, harden not your heart..." (Psalm 95:7). Tom encourages all believers to be modern-day Bereans, who, according to Acts 17:11, "searched the scriptures daily" to see if what they were being taught was true to God's Word.



Call TBC today to reserve your copies!

Special Offer!



A Woman Rides the Beast—

Book, Audio and Video

Hunt—
Book (B01999): *The Catholic Church and the Last Days*. In Revelation 17, John describes

in great detail the characteristics of a false church that will be the partner of the Antichrist. Was he describing the Roman Catholic Church? To answer that question, Dave has spent years gathering research and indisputable historical documentation (from primarily Catholic sources) providing information not generally available.

Video (VT028): Great companion to the book and must viewing for one with a burden for those in bondage to Rome.

Audio (AT009): Mary worship feminist spirituality and the one-world religion.

Regular Price \$39, only \$25
until 5/31/04



RCFC Conferences MP3

RCFC—Digitally Remastered! Mp3 Archives Series: Reaching Catholics For Christ Conferences in one 4-CD set in Mp3!

• **ECT Plus 5:** A look at the state of ecumenism since the signing of Evangelicals and Catholics Together

• **The Reformation: Is It Still Relevant?** Challenges the compromises by evangelicals to "reconcile" with the Roman Church;

• **Religious Babylon and Endtime Prophecy:** A fascinating look at how the ecumenical movement compromises God's Word and fits into Last Days prophecies.

Many hours of teaching from great teachers, including Q&A sessions and panel discussions. *This CD requires an MP3 player, or will play in most computers and DVD players.*

MP3 103 \$16

Cover graphic

Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* has taken the evangelical world by storm despite presenting an extrabiblical vision of Jesus.

Showtime for the Sheep?

T.A. McMahon

(Excerpts from the upcoming book)

Introduction: As soon as Mel Gibson's directorial end-credit popped up on the black screen, I made a dash up the aisle while searching my jacket pockets for my cell phone....As I ran from the theater, my mind was also racing with thoughts about what I had just experienced. Moments later I was at my car talking to a Seattle TV news reporter shortly before she was to go on the air. She knew from The Berean Call's website that we had had some reservations about the film prior to seeing it, and she wanted our critical perspective after we had viewed it....

I don't remember exactly what I said, but as I recall it went something like this: "Having spent a number of years in the movie industry, particularly as a screenwriter, I appreciated Mel Gibson's craftsmanship in bringing his personal vision of Christ's crucifixion and death to the screen. Technically, it's a superb movie. On the other hand, as one who loves and studies the Scriptures, I would not let Mel lead a Bible study in my home. His vision does not square with the Word of God."

Of course, that was just one filmgoer's rushed and somewhat emotional reaction. My drive home that evening was more of the same. My mind was still racing. Concerns I'd had previous to seeing *The Passion of the Christ* were colliding with images from the big screen itself....

If what I related above seems to be a bit too emotional to allow for objectivity about this subject, I appreciate that concern. Let's hope I can get past that initial reaction...and get on with a presentation of content that is the result of objective reasoning. Common sense may also contribute, but *biblical sense* is my goal. I hope that readers will also be aware of their own emotional biases as they come into play. That may not be easy for any of us. After all, for the most part, I'll be discussing a *movie*. Try quantifying, "I loved it!"; "I hated it!"; "It made me laugh"; "It made me cry"; "It changed my life"; "It put me to sleep"; "It's the greatest film ever made"; "It stunk!" Opposing reactions such as these toward movies of all kinds have kept spouses from talking to each other for hours, if not days. Emotions are the lifeblood of the film medium. The more a movie captures the

emotions of its audience, the more effective the movie.

Tens of thousands of tickets were purchased by evangelical churches and organizations so that their members could attend Mel Gibson's theatrical production of an historical event recorded for us in Scripture—the most important of all time and eternity....The list of endorsers for *The Passion* seemed to lack no well-known Christian leader. Denominational lines quickly disappeared in the wake of widespread enthusiasm. A massive herding of the sheep was taking place throughout Christendom, and the flocks were being (and continue to be) driven to a *movie*. Is that a good thing?

On the other hand, there are many believers (including those who have not seen the film) who are taking advantage of the notoriety of *The Passion* to share the *biblical Jesus and His gospel of salvation* with anyone who wants to talk about the movie. That's a great thing!

Chapter 11—Another Gospel? Some critics of *The Passion of the Christ* dislike it because of the extreme violence it portrays. A critic from *Newsweek* called it "the Gospel according to the Marquis de Sade." *The New Yorker* reported the movie to be "a sickening death trip, a grimly unilluminating procession of treachery, beatings, blood and agony." An article in the *Hollywood Reporter* [noted]: "...Flesh is flayed in grotesque detail. Body fluids spurt in exquisite patterns....[T]he key figure here, Jesus himself (a game, blood-crusted Jim Caviezel), is such a punching bag for most of the movie that the filmmakers lose sight of his message."¹

Critics are certainly entitled to their opinions, but I don't think the filmmaker lost sight of *his message*.

Nationally known movie reviewer Roger Ebert, who gave *The Passion* his top rating, writes: "The movie is 126 minutes long, and I would guess that at least 100 of those minutes, maybe more, are concerned specifically and graphically with the *details of the torture and death of Jesus*. This is the most violent film I have ever seen" (emphasis added).² Ebert said in a final note: "It will probably be the most violent [film] you have ever seen. This is not a criticism but an observation...but [it] works powerfully for those who can endure it."³

In what way does the movie "work powerfully"? Movie magic and theology! Mel has ushered the viewer into *his vision*

of the physical sufferings and death of Jesus, which he believes were necessary for a sinful humanity to be reconciled to God. As a gifted filmmaker, he put together everything that he knew to be effective in his medium to best convey (and convince others of) his *theological understanding* of what took place. Yet, sadly, this film misses the punishment for our sins that Christ endured from God and focuses exclusively on the physical sufferings inflicted by men—which could never save but only condemn us. This tragic misunderstanding is the very heart of the movie and must be corrected by anyone seeking to evangelize those who have been stirred to interest by viewing Gibson's film.

All of this didn't spring from his imagination overnight. He combined his lifetime of experience in Catholicism with his last dozen years of studying the Passion, and packaged it in his film craft. Mel gave some of the background to Ray Arroyo of EWTN:

ARROYO: I want to talk for a second about the violence....Why did you decide, "I want it to be this brutal?"

GIBSON: I don't think it's as brutal as it really was...I stopped way short of what I think probably really happened. However, it is brutal. It is graphic....I don't know—it *should* be shocking....

ARROYO: You didn't just throw—slap this together. You spent a lot of time studying flagellations, crucifixions...tell me a little about that study.

GIBSON: Oh, gosh, I mean there's a lot of books you can read on the subject, not the least of which was Anne Emmerich's [*The Dolorous Passion*], in which she talked of these things. It's like, well, vicious. Also, even in more recent times, there's medical guides that have sort of gone into it....

ARROYO: No man could have survived it.

GIBSON: No, I don't think so. No, the divine was definitely at work here.

I agree with Mel. The divine was definitely at work—not, however, in the sense in which Mel believes, nor in the focus upon which he has devoted so much of his time, thought, energy, finances, and *faith*. All he sees and attempts to portray is human brutality vented upon Christ, because Catholicism emphasizes *physical* suffering, whether in this life or in purgatory—but the physical cannot pay the penalty for sin.

Let's consider *only* what the Bible says

about the matter... The first verse that most Christians commit to memory is John 3:16: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

This verse raises some questions that need to be answered: 1) why does God love us—"the world"? and 2) why give His Son? The basic answer to number one is: It's not because there's anything lovely in us, but because of God's infinite attribute: "God is love" (1 Jn 4:8). Question number two is answered partially within the verse itself. *Believing* in His Son is necessary to avoid perishing (i.e., being separated from God forever) and to gain everlasting life (i.e., being with Him forever).

But that leaves us with some other questions that are critical to a basic understanding of the gospel—the good news of why Jesus came: What's the problem?! What was so serious that God had to send His Son to solve? *Sin*. The Bible tells us that "all have sinned" and "the wages of sin is death" (Rom 3:23; 6:23). Everyone is a sinner; we're all reaping the destruction that sin produces; and, left on our own, every sinner is presently separated from God and will be forever. Mankind has a hopeless problem that he cannot solve. Only God can provide the solution. But why send His Son? Why not just forgive everyone and start fresh? It has to do with God's attributes. One is love, as we've seen, and another is *justice*: God is "a God of truth... just and right is he" (Dt 32:4). God declared to the first man that the penalty for sin is death (Gn 2:17). The Creator of the universe *set* this penalty, and His perfect justice demands that this penalty—this *infinite* penalty—be paid.

Since every man is a sinner and is therefore under eternal condemnation, there is nothing he can do about the penalty except to pay the eternal consequences. Divine justice must be satisfied. However, God is also love, and in His perfect love He provided the solution for the justly condemned. That's the good news! God became a Man ("And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us"—Jn 1:14; "...the man Christ Jesus"—1 Tm 2:5) in order to pay the penalty due all humanity. As the Scriptures clearly indicate, Jesus, who is very God and perfect Man, and who will never cease to be God and Man, needed both attributes to be our Savior. He had to become a Man to die physically, and He had to be God in order to pay the infinite penalty that God's perfect justice required.

We can readily understand that Jesus had to die physically, "for without shedding of blood [there] is no remission [of sin]" (Heb 9:22). But since the full punishment includes *spiritual separation* from God forever, our finite minds cannot comprehend how Jesus could pay that penalty on the cross. Yet we

know it must be so. Hebrews 2:9 tells us that Christ "by the grace of God should *taste death* for every man." He *became sin for us* (2 Cor 5:21), and the wrath of God due every sinner was poured out on Him (Jn 3:36).

In the three hours on the cross, Christ somehow experienced the punishment due every sinner. Or did he? If He only suffered *physically* and died *physically*, then the "everlasting punishment" due for sin that Jesus spoke about (Mt 25:46) wasn't covered. But the words that Jesus exclaimed from the cross tell us that He indeed covered everything: "It is finished!" That term in the Greek (*tetelestai*) was written on bills of sale during the time period of our Lord, and it translates, "Paid in full." Through the full payment by Him, "all that believe are *justified from all things*" (Acts 13:39). We were "bought with a price" (1 Cor 7:23), and through his *eternal* payment He "obtained *eternal* redemption for us" (Heb 9:12). Only an infinite God could pay that price (see Q&A).

The most important "scene" in the Scriptures (as far as revealing the divine penalty that Christ had to "suffer") took place in the Garden of Gethsemane. In contrast to the terse and limited accounts (less than ten verses in *all* the gospels address His being scourged or crucified) and the scarcity of details (see TBC Extra) regarding His physical suffering in the gospels, the description of what took place in the Garden is the *only* "up-close-and-personal" revelation of the *suffering* and internal agony of Jesus: "And he said Abba, Father, all things are possible unto thee; take away this cup from me: nevertheless not what I will, but what thou wilt" (Mk 14:36); "And being in agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling to the ground" (Lk 22:44).

Was Jesus agonizing over the physical suffering that He knew He was about to experience at the hands of men? No. Thousands of men before and after Him suffered scourging and crucifixion—some hanging on their crosses for days in prideful defiance. Were scourging and being nailed to a cross the worst possible tortures men could devise? Not even close. What Christian martyrs experienced during the inquisitions was unspeakably worse. All tortures were designed to cause the most horrific pain and suffering possible while managing to keep the victim alive. Martyrs in Islamic countries have had their bodies roasted and their skin peeled completely off their torsos. Whatever men did to torture Jesus only demonstrated the wickedness of the human heart. It contributed nothing toward satisfying divine justice.

Jesus offered the above prayer three times to "Abba, Father." *Abba* is a very intimate term that is sometimes translated

as "Daddy." He knew the price He was about to pay: separation from His Father. Although we can't fathom how great the love that exists between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we get an inkling of it in the reaction of Jesus. His heart agonized so intensely "that his sweat was as it were great drops of blood." But it didn't stop there. He became "sin for us!" It was for us that He suffered the wrath of His Father. It was for our sakes that "it pleased the LORD [Jehovah God] to bruise Him; *he* hath put him to grief" (Is 53:10). Jehovah made "his *soul* an offering for sin" (emphasis added). To comprehend such love is beyond us, but having even a sense of it is enough to fill our hearts with profound gratitude for all eternity.

Between the sixth hour and the ninth hour, darkness descended over all the earth (Lk 23:44) and Jesus cried out (something He never did throughout the physical abuses of scourging and crucifixion!), "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Mt 27:46). This was when our "ransom" was paid (1 Tm 2:6). "And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit: and having said thus, he gave up the ghost" (Lk 23:46). Charles Wesley wrote something wonderful to ponder, but steeped in the mystery of godliness: "Amazing love, how can it be, that thou my God, shouldst die for me?"

It is clear from the Scriptures that man can have no part in his own redemption. Logic tells us the same. An evangelical friend of mine had a conversation with a nun. She told him they both had much in common, with this one difference: he believed that Jesus paid 100 percent of the penalty for salvation. She believed that Jesus paid 99 percent, and, as a Catholic she needed to pay the remaining 1 percent. Is that possible? What is one percent of eternal separation from God? She and Mel (as did I, growing up Catholic) focus on a redemption that cannot save them or anyone else. It is a rejection of Christ's unspeakable gift—something that only He could, and did, pay completely. Nevertheless, that's the Gospel of Rome:

Every man has his own share in the Redemption....In bringing about the Redemption through suffering, Christ has also raised human suffering to the level of the Redemption. Thus each man, in his suffering, can also become a sharer in the redemptive suffering of Christ.

John Paul II, *Salvifici Doloris*, no. 19.

Is this the sort of teaching that an evangelical would want communicated in his church or Bible study? What about the teachings regarding Mary? What about sending anyone to a movie to absorb Mel's vision? Would that in any way be related to turning the sheep over to a "hireling"? **TBC**

Quotable

[Idolatry] is a pestilence that walks in the Church of Christ...that sin which God has especially denounced in His Word...to which the Jews seem to have been most inclined before the destruction of Solomon's temple....It brought on Israel the armies of Egypt, Assyria, and Babylon...scattered the ten tribes, burned up Jerusalem, and carried Judah and Benjamin into captivity. It brought on the Eastern Churches...the living death in which...Asia Minor and Syria are buried....

The cause of all idolatry is the natural corruption of man's heart...that great family disease...a craving...after something he can see, and feel, and touch [to] bring his God down to his own crawling level...a thing of sense and sight. He has no idea of the religion of heart, and faith, and spirit.... There is a natural...tendency in us all to give God a sensual, carnal worship...to devise visible helps...in our approaches to Him, and ultimately to give these inventions of our own the honour due to Him....

[Already] in the fourth century, Jerome complains, "images have come in...passed to the Christians from the Gentiles." Eusebius says, "We do see that images of Peter and Paul, and of our Saviour Himself be made...Pontius Paulinus, Bishop of Nola, in the fifth century, caused the walls of the temples to be painted with stories taken out of the Old Testament; that the people beholding and considering these pictures might the better abstain from too much surfeiting and riot. But from learning by painted stories, it came by little and little to idolatry.

St. Paul dwells on this subject....If any Corinthian called a brother was an idolater, with such an one "not to eat" (1 Cor 5:11). "Neither be ye idolaters, as were some of our fathers" (10:7). He says again... "My dearly beloved, flee from idolatry" (10:14)....John closes his first epistle with the solemn injunction, "Little children, keep yourselves from idols" (1 Jn 5:21).

J.C. Ryle,

Warnings to the Churches, 1877

Q&A

Question: A friend recently got involved with something at his church called The Alpha Course. It convinced him that by learning certain techniques one "can hear directly from God." What is The Alpha Course? Is it widespread?

Answer: God's power can no more be "activated" by techniques than can His love. This is science, not faith, and applies to the physical, not the spiritual. Scientific methods release and control the physical

power in the universe. That there must be "principles" for scientifically releasing "spiritual power" is the error of "Christian Science" and other positive mental attitude cults and courses. Alpha is one of the newest and most popular.

This delusion, rampant in false religions such as witchcraft, was brought into the evangelical church by Norman Vincent Peale (who claimed that "Positive Thinking" equals "faith") and his chief disciple, Robert Schuller (who claims the same for "Possibility Thinking"). Peale wrote: "God is energy. As you breathe God in, as you visualize His energy, you will be reenergized....! Just as there exist scientific techniques for the release of atomic energy, so are there scientific procedures for the release of spiritual energy through the mechanism of prayer....As in any...science one must learn...the formula for...receiving this power." Schuller, who calls Peale his "mentor," teaches basically the same.

The Bible teaches that "the just live by faith" (Hab 2:4; Rom 1:17; Gal 3:11; Heb 10:38), not by "techniques" or "principles." Yet Pat Robertson, like other "positive confession" teachers (Hagin, Copeland, Hinn, Price, Cerullo, Hickey, Meyer, Crouch, Roberts, et al.), describes his book, *Beyond Reason*, as "an effort to teach some of the basic principles that enable you to...experience the flow of God's energy [according to laws] as valid for our lives as...the law of gravity." Says Pat, "You can perform miracles if you but understand...the laws...that unlock God's power....We speak to money, and it comes. We speak to storms, and they cease...when you confess...success, [it] will come to you....[T]he Bible is not an impractical book of theology, but a system of thought and conduct that will guarantee success." (These quotes and more, with sources, are found in *Occult Invasion*. See offering list).

The Alpha Course is another form of "religious science," with millions of followers in thousands of churches, Catholic, Protestant, and evangelical. It was conceived by Nicky Gumbel of Holy Trinity Brompton Anglican Church in England after Gumbel got the "power" through the "Toronto Blessing," later passed on to Steve Hill, who started the "revival" at Brownsville Assembly of God in Pensacola, Florida. Alpha has been endorsed by church leaders, from Robert Schuller and the Archbishop of Canterbury to J.I. Packer and Leighton Ford.

Alpha presents the gospel at times, but its "conversion" is more to a "Christian lifestyle" than to Christ the way, the truth, and the life; and its major aim is impartation of "supernatural power," especially healing and speaking in tongues. Participants look forward above all to the big weekend when they will receive Holy Spirit empowerment. I remember the "testimony" of a man devoted

to Eastern Mysticism who "got the Holy Spirit" that weekend—but clearly remained unsaved.

Question: You claim that the payment for sins was not through the physical sufferings of Christ inflicted by man, but spiritual sufferings endured at the hands of God. Yet Isaiah 53:5 says "...and by his stripes we are healed." The NASB has, "...and by his scourging we are healed." Please admit your error!

Answer: The NASB is wrong. The Hebrew *chabburah* translated "stripes" occurs six other times (Gn 4:23; Ex 21:25; Ps 38:5; Prv 20:30; Is 1:6) and it *never* means Roman scourging. Do you really think (as Mel Gibson's film erroneously attempts to show) that Roman soldiers' torture of Christ paid the eternal penalty for all of the murders, rapes, wars, hatred, jealousy, and unimaginable evil committed by billions of people during the history of mankind? Sinful soldiers can't mete out to the Holy Son of God the righteous punishment for the sins of the world!

Peter specifically says Christ paid for our sins *on the cross* (1 Pt 2:24), not when scourged. It was *during those 3 hours of darkness on the Cross* that God laid on Christ the infinite penalty for the sins of the world—and only when He had paid for our sins in full did He cry in triumph, "It is finished!" Not because of His scourging, but as a result of what Christ accomplished *on the Cross*, the rocks were split, the earth quaked and the veil of the temple was ripped open (Mt 27:51).

First Peter 2:24 indicates that the healing by "stripes" is not from disease (as some teach) but from sin: "Who his own self bare our *sins*...." That this refers to spiritual punishment is clear: "thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin" (Is 53:10). Like the soul, sin itself, though expressed in physical acts, is *spiritual*: "For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness..." (Mk 7:21, 22).

Salvation is *spiritual* and can only be by faith. To receive forgiveness of sins and eternal life as a gift from God is the greatest spiritual good conceivable. Physical punishment executed by sinful men could never make that gift possible. Thus the physical stripes Christ received in fulfillment of prophecy could not pay the penalty for sin; only God's spiritual punishment could do that.

Healing from sin and its penalty is what the gospel is all about: "How that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures" (1 Cor 15:3)—not that "Christ died for our physical ailments." The promise, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou

shalt be saved” (Acts 16:31) clearly pertains to salvation from sin, not from disease. Christians in general are neither healthier nor live longer in this life than unbelievers—but we have eternal life.

The Hebrew noun *chabburah* translated “stripes” is singular in Isaiah 53:5, indicating *one blow from God* wounding Christ “for our transgressions,” bruising Him “for our iniquities”—not the many stripes of scourging that were a major focus of Mel Gibson’s attempt to show that Christ’s physical sufferings paid for the sins of all mankind. Do you really believe that what Christ physically endured in the scourging and crucifixion was equal to what sinners will endure for all eternity in the lake of fire?

There is nothing in any of the four gospels (other than crowning Him with thorns and mocking Him as a king) to indicate that Christ’s scourging and crucifixion were any worse physically than that suffered by thousands of others. That “Pilate marvelled if he were already dead” (Mk 15:44) contradicts the idea that Christ was scourged and tortured within an inch of His life. Thus the statement that “his visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men” (Is 52:14) could not be due to unusual physical beating, but to such intense spiritual agony that His features were so distorted that it was awesome to behold.

The idea that the physical suffering Christ endured at the hands of men paid for the sins of the world is neither biblical nor rational for at least four reasons: 1) Christ didn’t come even close to suffering more physically than any other person. Some men hung in agony for days on crosses, the Assyrians flayed their enemies alive, some victims of the Inquisition were roasted for hours over a slow fire, and the Inquisitors competing to develop the most excruciating torture—sometimes even bringing victims back from the brink of death, letting them heal, and then torturing them again; 2) if the physical “stripes” paid the penalty for sin, Christ’s physical tormenters would have played a vital role in our redemption and would in a sense be our co-redeemers (and what if they failed to torment Him *enough* to save us?!); 3) the punishment for those who reject Christ is eternal, but those who scourged and crucified Christ were incapable of inflicting eternal punishment; and 4) physical suffering could never adequately cause the moral and spiritual pain which must be involved in the just punishment of sin—in fact, it would obliterate it.

The error that physical scourging paid for our sins is also refuted by Scripture’s declaration that Christ “made peace through the blood of his cross” (Col 1:20), not “the blood of his scourging,” which took place before He was led to Golgotha. We are “justified through his blood” (Rom 5:9), which

includes His death. Had he merely bled but not died, we could not be saved. The phrase “shedding of blood” (Lv 17:11; 2 Chr 29:24, etc.) always means death, not wounding as in scourging—and this is the only means of atonement: “without shedding of blood is no remission” (Heb 9:22).

Christ “by himself purged our sins” (Heb 1:3). While this could not be without the shedding of His blood at the hands of others, there was something which He alone had to do to purge us from our sins. That could only have been to endure eternal punishment at the hands of God which no man could exact from Him—something far worse than the “stripes” of scourging.

Christ’s spiritual sufferings for sin are beyond our understanding and Scripture only hints at them: “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me...? smitten of God, and afflicted...wounded for our transgressions...bruised for our iniquities...the chastisement of our peace was upon him...the Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all...for the transgression of my people was he stricken...it pleased the Lord to bruise him...thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin...the travail of his soul...poured out his soul unto death...he bare the sin of many...he hath made him to be sin for us, [he] who knew no sin...” (Ps 22:1; Is 53:4-6, 8, 10-12; 2 Cor 5:21), etc.

Christ’s sweating in spiritual agony “as it were great drops of blood” (Lk 22:44) and pleading with His Father in the Garden to be spared “this cup” (Mt 26:39, 42) could not have been in dread of the scourging and crucifixion (as implied in the film) which thousands of others also endured. “This cup” from which He shrank could only have been that He would be “made sin for us”—that He would “bear our sins in His own body” and be punished by God to the full extent demanded by His justice for the sins of the entire world. During those three hours of darkness on the Cross, all the “waves and billows” of God’s wrath against the sins of all mankind rolled over Him (Ps 42:7; 88:7; Jon 2:3).

Isaiah declares that Yahweh “bruised [Him] for our iniquities.” It is unbiblical and irrational to suggest that the Roman soldiers were guided by God in each blow as God’s means of punishing Christ for sin. Christ said, “No man taketh it [my life] from me, but I lay it down of myself” (Jn 10:18). It is God’s law which men have broken, He pronounced the penalty and He alone can execute it in righteousness. Therefore, the payment for our sins could only have been through the punishment Christ endured at the hands of God, not men.

Christ had to be more than mere man: He had to be God manifest in the flesh to endure the eternal punishment due for the sins of all mankind in the three hours of

darkness. We are told that He “by the grace of God should taste death for every man” (Heb 2:9). That had to include the “second death”—eternity of punishment in the lake of fire which is yet future for the lost. This could not have been at the hands of the Roman soldiers who scourged and mocked Him, but only at the hands of God.

News Alert

AP, 4/7/04: Salt Lake City—A delegation of Illinois officials apologized to leaders of the Mormon Church on Wednesday for the 1844 murder of the church’s founder and the expulsion of Mormons from Illinois.

Lt. Gov. Pat Quinn and others made the trip to Utah a week after the Illinois House approved a resolution expressing regret for violence against Mormons, including the slaying of Joseph Smith Jr., founder of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

“There was a chapter in our history that we are not proud of,” Quinn said after meeting privately with church leaders and Utah officials, including Gov. Olene Walker. Quinn said he hoped the gesture would make Mormons feel welcome in Illinois. Each year, about 350,000 Mormons visit Nauvoo, Ill., where Smith settled, and about 51,000 Mormons now live in Illinois.

James E. Faust, one of the church’s top leaders, said the resolution is a “message of respect and reconciliation” that will “long live in the hearts of this people.”

Church President Gordon B. Hinckley, 93, did not attend the meeting because of the death of his wife on Tuesday.

Mormons built Nauvoo into a city of 20,000, one of the largest in the nation at the time, about 210 miles southwest of Chicago. But their religious beliefs and growing power created friction with non-Mormons. In 1844, Smith and his brother were arrested, and a mob broke into the jail and killed them.

More violence followed, and the new church leader, Brigham Young, guided his followers out of the state in 1846, first to Iowa and then on to Utah, where they arrived in 1847.

[TBC: One might think that this gesture would convict the LDS church into apologizing to the country for their own culpability in the worst religious atrocity ever committed in America: the Mountain Meadows massacre of 140 Arkansas emigrants in 1857.]

Endnotes

- 1 Honeycutt, Kirt, *The Hollywood Reporter*, as quoted in the *Santa Barbara News-Press*, 3/25/04
- 2 Ebert, Roger, *The Bend Bulletin*, section B, 3/25/04
- 3 Ibid.