



Dear Friends,
 So much has been written over the past few weeks about Mel Gibson's new film, 'The Passion of the Christ'. Many of those who have seen previews of the film speak so highly of it that Christians are encouraged to invite non-Christians to see it with them in the belief that it has great evangelistic appeal. In this belief three churches in Kent have between them invested £40,000 in purchasing tickets to give away free to the general public. Though I have the disadvantage of not having seen the film, I have only read what others have written about it, I'm afraid I do not share this view, and I'll tell you why.

In these days in which we are all too aware of the face and cost of violence and people's inhumanity to each other, e.g. Madrid, Kosovo, Iraq, Uganda et al - I believe the last thing we need is a depiction of the gospel of God's love which finds its focus in gratuitous violence. While I would in no way want to minimise the physical pain and agony of crucifixion it is not the whole story, neither is it helpful nor edifying to concentrate on the details of violence in the way this film does.

I believe it is also a distortion of the gospel, for it was not the only pain Christ bore on our behalf. Far more real to him was the inner pain of the burden of sin which he bore on our behalf and which that excruciating cry of utter dereliction and apparent estrangement from his heavenly Father, '*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me,*' expressed. The inner pain of love rejected and abused, and yet triumphant, was the real cost and glory of the crucifixion.

Awful though the physical suffering of Christ must have been I believe the real agony and pain for him was an inner and spiritual suffering the like of which we, sinners that we are, cannot begin to imagine. And because of this I believe it is unhelpful to focus on the physical sufferings of Christ in such a concentrated way, partly for the reasons given above, but also because many other people throughout history have suffered just as horrific violence for what they have believed, many of them because they were followers of Christ. Christ's physical sufferings on their own, which are what it appears this film is largely about, were not unique.

And just in case we are led to believe that Christ's suffering ended at the cross let us remember that because he is love his suffering continues today in the lives of his children who are themselves suffering at the hands of those who perpetrate violence in whatever name and for whatever cause. The message of the gospel for us today is surely that we turn from cruelty and violence, not feed on it.

The Lord be with you,

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 Bromley Methodist Church

In this edition John Bown writes our leading article. It also appears in the magazines of Bromley Methodist Church & Bromley URC