

More letters on “Why has The Passion of the Christ evoked such a popular response in America?”

20 March 2004

Below we most additional letters on David Walsh’s March 5 article, “Why has The Passion of the Christ evoked such a popular response in America?”

I had not intended to get involved in the furor around this film, not being a religious person. But the thoughtful and articulate quality of this review and of the responses already received has drawn me in.

I may be wrong, but I think that no one so far seems to have mentioned the concepts of sadism and masochism. This is not surprising, since in a kind of Orwellian way they seem to have been removed from our public discourse. I have followed this as a student of psychoanalytic theory, where there is a significant literature. The *Diagnostic and Standard Manual of the American Psychiatric Association* includes these terms in its edition 3-R of 1987; however, they are absent in subsequent editions. One has to wonder if this is part of a general effort to stamp out the heresy of humanism and of concepts such as Fromm’s “man for himself.” Curiously, there even appears to be a tendency, even among those who should know better, to think of de Sade himself as some sort of champion of freedom; at least, I read comments to this effect in response to *Quills*.

Sado-masochism is related to fascism and paranoia but provides a broader conceptual framework linking these concepts with authoritarianism. Perhaps many of your readers are not old enough to remember the years around WW2 when there was a concerted effort to come to terms with and understand how the Hitler regime was possible. For instance, the American Jewish Committee published, in 1950, *The Authoritarian Personality*, which is much more specific than better-known work such as that of Hannah Arendt. Especially relevant to Gibson is Theodor Reik’s *Masochism and*

Modern Man (1941), with chapters on “The Secret Meaning of the Display in Public” and “The Paradoxes of Christ.” The effect of the emotional power of a film such as this one is that it dominates the thinking of the viewer, such that he is unable to entertain points of view other than the two choices of sadism and masochism.

In saying this, I do not intend to attack the sincere religious beliefs of others of your readers. However, I believe this deserves to be said as well. I personally am not a Jew. I was raised to be a Lutheran and am now a student of mythology as well as psychology. Without meaning to be flippant, I suggest that the figure of the dying god originated with beliefs about the cycles of nature. However, when these are transplanted to Roman Judea, the problem in formal terms is how the god is to die.

NR

12 March 2004

This was the very best review/analysis I have seen anywhere of the movie. I have been bewildered by the film’s drawing power—you have helped me see this situation in a way that makes a lot of sense. Thank you.

CH

Cleveland Heights, Ohio

13 March 2004

Dear Sirs/Madam:

I am sorry but my opinion on the whole issue of this movie is one of utter disgust. We are upset about Hollywood violence perpetrated on a mythical person that most people, through lack of critical thinking, believe without question. I am more concerned about the terrible violence perpetrated against people throughout history and to the present that are real, by people of power and wealth against those without. I am

concerned about the violence in the name of God, however that is defined, against millions upon millions throughout history and about to be unleashed to even higher degrees by the ignorant who remained controlled, through religion, by the powerful and wealthy. I am concerned that so many people get upset by a work of fiction passed off as nonfiction while history provides us with such clear, documented examples of cruelty that makes the *The Passion* look like a walk in the park. Why are we not upset about that? Why do we remain immune to the suffering of the children right now, at this moment, dying from war (God is on my side), disease and starvation largely brought upon this world by the greed of the power elite?

I am concerned that the majority of the population refuses to educate themselves, but rather live under a veil that Hollywood represents truth, that violent religions represent truth, that media spin represents truth, that remaining under these illusions is safe.

When you let others do your thinking for you, you no longer are thinking. Do your homework; it takes work.

Sincerely,

SN

10 March 2004



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