

Good Friday

THE PASSION OF THE CHRIST

John 18-19

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Analysis by Bruce T. Martin

DIAGNOSIS: Dying in Truth

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) – *Beholding THE truth*

Mel Gibson's film "The Passion of the Christ" follows the story line of John 18-19, graphically setting before us the final sufferings (passion) of Jesus. What do we see, whether in the text or the film? A man tortured to death. A man embracing his cross. A man not willing to deny the legal charge against him, "King of the Jews" (18:33, 39; 19:3, 14, 15, 19). A man covered in blood, dressed in kingly garb with a crown of thorns, sitting on the Judgment Seat (19:13). Ecce homo! "Behold the man!" (19:5) declared Pilate in derision. A man crucified for all to see. A dead man. This is what we see, for flesh cannot see anything but flesh. But thank God we now see much more. We see the One who three times said, in the absolute, "I am [he]" (18:5, 6, 8), recalling the divine Name ("I AM," Ex. 3:14-15; and seven times elsewhere in John, 6:35; 8:12; 10:9, 11; 11:25; 14:6; 15:1). We see the true King of the Jews, the Shepherd of Israel, the Anointed of God (Messiah in Hebrew, Christ in Greek). Therefore the suffering and death that we see cannot belong to him but to us! We see what our sin against God looks and feels like, what we do to God. We see true horror, unrestrained and relentless, exploding emotions. On a basic level, what we see in the passion of the Christ is who we truly

are, what we truly do. We see the otherwise hidden “truth” (18:38) that we ourselves are on trial before God.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) – *Evading THE truth*

The cross as the mirror of truth displays not only our outward sin but our inward sinfulness. The crucifixion of Jesus could not have happened without our willing participation: in the guise of those who pleaded “Crucify him!” (19:6, 15), of those who ordered him crucified, and of those who in deed crucified him. For who could believe that this bloodied man was the “Son of God” (19:7) whose “power” (19:11) was being demonstrated in such horrendous suffering? No one could, then or now, for flesh can only believe in flesh. Moreover, since it was the Son of God whom we crucified, our sinfulness must be exceedingly great, overwhelming all our senses and all our possibilities, as odious and as certain as death. Only in our vain imaginings, then, which are plentiful, do we presume that the crucified Jesus is not the Son of God. Worse yet, because we hoard our deeds as somehow worthy of God’s praise, we cannot allow anyone, even the Son of God, to bear our deeds for us. So we seek at every turn to get rid of him, to crucify him.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) – *Crossed by THE truth, Part I*

But God will not be evaded. Instead, God will invade us with truth and consequences. If the Son of God was truly crucified, his death could not have been the result of his own sin but of ours. Nonetheless, if the Son of God was truly crucified, he did bear our sin and did so willingly. Thus in a single moment (for which the Word became flesh), God’s “glory” (1:14; 17:1) in love and wrath are displayed for all to see. Both we and God get “crossed” in Jesus. God gets us, and we get God. Apart from Jesus, we have no future. What, then, is the antecedent of “it” in “It is finished” (19:30)? WE are finished, reduced to death,

to utter passivity and humility before God.

[The text ends with Jesus' burial; ours, too. But this day cannot be called "good" if that is the end, either for the Son or for us. Though the day is solemn, rite-wise, it is rightly overshadowed by the eastering of Jesus; ours, too.]

PROGNOSIS: Rising in Truth

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) – *Crossed by THE truth, Part II*

The resurrection of the Christ is inseparable from the crucifixion of the Christ. And inasmuch as Jesus took us into himself, we are raised with him even if only by promise. By what right? By the righteousness of the Son we received in exchange for our sinfulness! Therefore we who are bound to Christ are not "finished" (19:30) until God is finished with us, including our eastering, to God's "glory." For such love (see 3:16) there is no accounting. No rationale, that is, that is inherent in us but in the Son; and not abstractly, but in his body. Hence his resurrection.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) – *Embracing THE truth*

Truth is, Jesus accomplished what we could never do, defeat death. To "believe" in Jesus is to embrace him as "true for us," to accept his work as God's own work on our behalf (20:28-31).

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) – *Following THE truth*

The in breaking of Easter creates a strange inversion. From now on, what we see, that is, what we-in-Christ see, is Christ alone working as one who has death behind him. When Christ is at work in our bodies (forgiving sins and loving others), we do not see ourselves at all, but Christ only. We are along for the ride, so to speak, "following" him who goes before us in all things

(20:21-22; 21:19). When we “love” the Lord (21:15), naturally we “feed HIS lambs” (21:15-17). But such feeding does not happen without suffering. Such love does not happen without being crucified to the world. Such TLC does not happen without the evident marks of Christ crucified in our flesh (which is all we see of him). When in faith and in love the Church follows Jesus, we bear the humiliated, crucified body of Christ for others – which is our “glory” until that final day when Easter comes for us, too.