

Harrison Carter
Passion
TRT: 2:46

<<Anchor Intro>>

Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* was released worldwide this past weekend in time for the Catholic Holy Week ... reigniting the controversy that has surrounded the movie since its February 25th release in the United States.

Harrison Carter reports on the controversy from Chapel Hill.

<<Nat Sound-woman buying movie ticket>>

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The Passion of the Christ is being seen by massive audiences amounting to a box office total of more than 300 million dollars in the US alone. Moviegoers continue to pour into the theatres as controversy surrounds the movie. Sociology professor at U-N-C Chapel Hill Christian Smith says it doesn't surprise him that so many are seeing the film.

<<CSbite1>>

"It's just a compelling movie; I mean it's a well done movie, if it were not a well done movie it probably wouldn't fly very well. Second thing is it appears to have been very well strategized in terms of its marketing."

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The controversy has several parts, but the claim that the movie contains or suggests anti-Semitic feelings has received the most attention. Pastor of the Newman Catholic Student Center Phillip Leach says that the movies' overall tone could have a negative impact on the relationship between Christians and Jews.

<<PLbite1>>

"I believe that some of the consequence of the movie could be an upsurge of religious intolerance."

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Members of the Jewish Community are also concerned that this film could evoke anti-Jewish sentiment. Rabbi Sharon Mars of U-N-C Hillel says it was hard to ignore the negative images of Jews in the Film.

<<SMbite1>>

"I found it difficult at times to see where Mr. Gibson really tried to portray Jews in a positive light. I thought that the images were intentionally ya know controversial."

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The Controversy goes beyond anti-Semitism to other issues including violence and the movies adherence to the teachings of the Gospels. Leach says that the movie represents Gibson's vision of certain parts of all of the Gospels, but not a specific teaching. Leach says the movie does get across part of the intended message of the gospels, but is not sure if the focus on suffering gets across the overall message.

<<PLbite2>>

"I think the principle message of all four of the gospels is that the suffering of Jesus leads to resurrection and that the suffering of Jesus had a purpose which was redemptive and salvific and I'm not sure I think that movie makes that point very powerfully."

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Smith says that the movie's message, however, can have a positive affect on Christians if understood in context.

<<CSbite2>>

"I think almost in a devotional sense it can have the effect of strengthening faith of believers already"

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Leach says that he does not believe that anything in the movie is explicitly wrong, but is unsure if it the right message to be presenting today.

<<PLbite3>>

“I think the overall ambience and message is not the way I understand God to be working in the 21st century.”

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The Passion’s graphic violence also bothers critics. Mars says the brutality overpowered moments of compassion and humanity and didn’t add to the films impact.

<<SMbite2>>

“The actually guts could have been ya know all the blood and gore could have been diminished and brought out the same message and had the same power.”

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Leach, Mars, and Smith say they now hope that all the discussion and debate surrounding the controversy will bring better understanding instead of negative feelings. From Chapel Hill this is Harrison Carter reporting.