

8B

RELIGION

Kids will see R-rated 'Passion'

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

As the debate rages over whether Mel Gibson's "The Passion of the Christ" is anti-Semitic, parents, church leaders and theater owners are wrangling over another issue: Should children see the brutal film?

The R-rated movie portrays the final 12 hours of Jesus' life in graphic detail, including the crucifixion and a beating that lasts 45 minutes. But many parents and church leaders plan to have kids as young as 10 see the film, which opens Feb. 25, Ash Wednesday.

"The violence is necessary to understand the sacrifice Jesus made," says First Family pastor Jerry Johnston. His Baptist church has rented out a half-dozen theaters in Kansas City, Kan., and has reserved auditoriums the night of Feb. 27 for children 11 and older.

Johnston concedes they'll be shaken by the violence. "I hope they're disturbed enough to make their peace with Jesus."

There is plenty in the two-hour film to make children and adults alike squirm:

- Roman guards employ a cat-o-nine-tails that rips the flesh from Jesus' back.
- As Jesus is being crucified, a supervisor scolds one man for not nailing his hands properly. He yanks Jesus' other hand, pulling the arm out of the socket.
- To see whether Jesus is dead, a Roman soldier pierces his side with a lance. Blood showers down on the soldier.

"Most images of Christ on the cross are too tame," says Matt Stoehr, pastor of the West Coast Christian Center in Vista, Calif. "They minimize the sacrifices he made. Scripture tells us that he was beaten to a pulp. I think seeing that on screen will be more powerful for kids than any sermon."

His church, about 30 miles south of Los Angeles, has rented out a theater Feb. 29 and will admit children 10 and older if they are accompanied by adults. Stoehr says he is thinking of raising the minimum age to 12, "but a lot of kids are already mature for their age. Look at what they see on MTV."

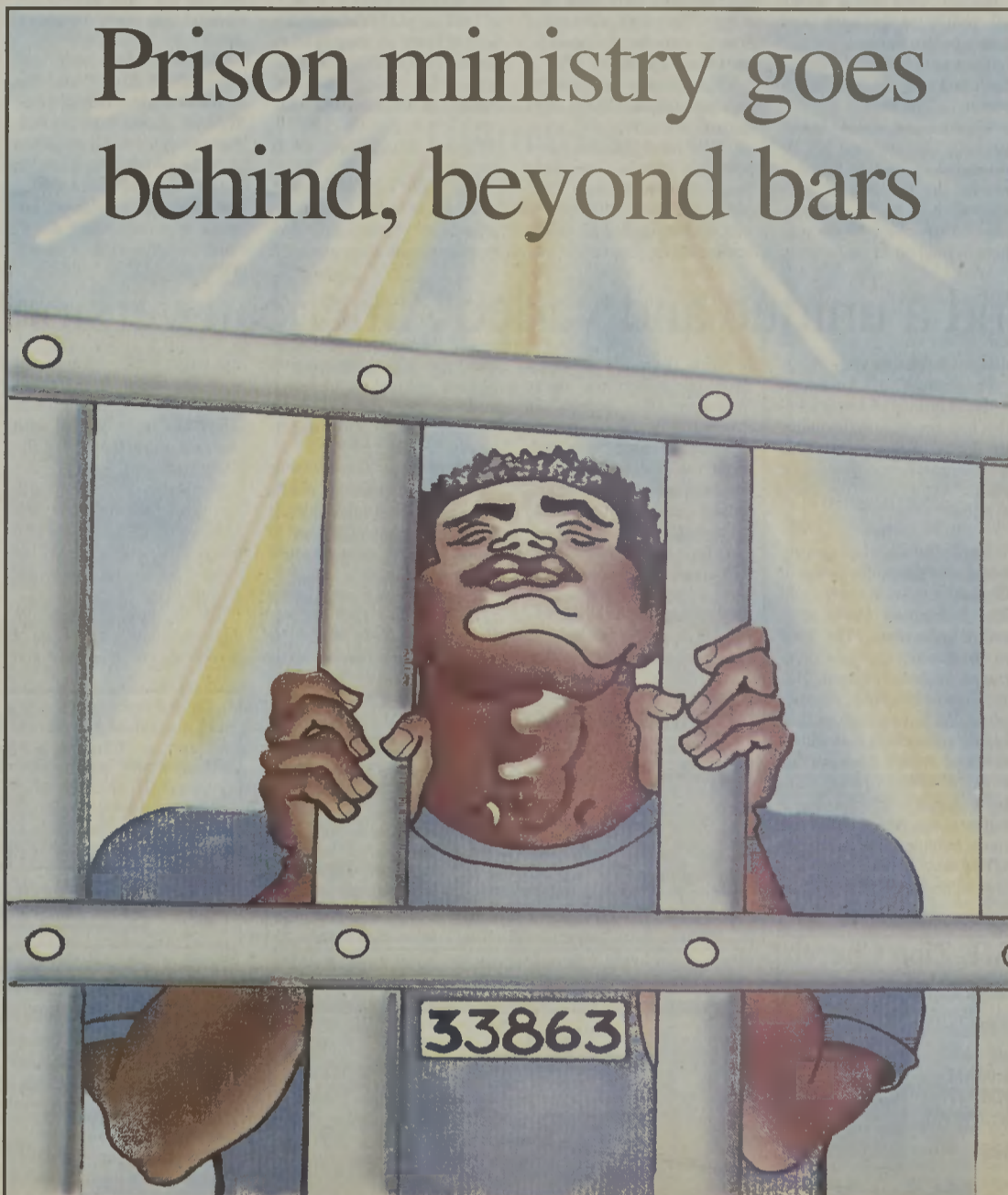
That's no reason to subject youngsters to Passion's adult themes, says columnist Nell Minow, "Movie Mom" for Yahoo! Movies. She has not seen the movie.

"Disturbing images can be what sticks with a child, not the message behind it," she says. "I would have severe concerns about exposing children to that kind of violence."

But theater owners already are bracing for a first: children flocking to a violent R-rated film with their parents' blessings. Regal Entertainment Group, which has 550 theaters and is the nation's largest theater chain, has issued consent forms that church leaders must sign to indicate they got parents' permission before showing the film to children in rented theaters.

"It's still an R-rated movie," Regal's Dick Westerling says. "Kids (under 17) still must have a parent or guardian with them."

Prison ministry goes behind, beyond bars



By Artellia Burch
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Return Ministries goes into prisons to spread the love of Jesus Christ, break the cycle of incarceration and erase the stigma of prison.

Since its inception 12 years ago, the ministry has reached out to inmates all over the country. The bulk of its work is conducted in the Carolinas and Virginia.

"The purpose of this organization is to win one soul to the acknowledgement of Jesus Christ, that he's here and going to be here," said Tyrone Scott, founder of Return Ministries. "We go into prisons and jails all over the country to spread the Word of God. We don't condemn people with our messages. We go to jails and prisons and tell them 'God loves you and we do

too.' We are heavy into North Carolina, South Carolina and Virginia. I hope we can travel more into Georgia this year."

"We usually do a two-day revival and give people hope. It's generally standing room only. We tell the inmates God forgives you of any situation. Our ministry has several components. We teach, preach, give seminars on domestic violence and provide counseling for rape victims."

Many Return Ministries volunteers are veterans in the correction system. Scott was chaplain at the Mecklenburg County Jail for 27 years.

Return Ministries also tries to help former prisoners reestablish themselves in society.

Michael York, director of the transitional department of Return Ministries recently retired after 30 years as a correction administrator. He says the purpose of the transitional side of the ministry is not to stress a person needs to be saved. The ministry's mission is to

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provide assistance to ex-offenders as they return to their communities and offer assistance to help them rebuild relationships with the people they left behind.

"We recognize there's a need to provide for men and women coming out of the system," York said. "You need a support system for an ex-offender to become reintegrated with the community and family. The family ties are broken when men and women go into the system. Folks get out of the system with nothing to do but revert back."

"There's always a willingness to spend money to build prisons. We will spend \$75 million to build a prison and \$25 million to run it the next year. If we only take a fraction of that money and invest it in solid programs than instead of having the number of inmates rising, the num-

See MINISTRY'S/7B

Scholars find a unique, varied 'American' Jesus

By Justin Pope
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

BOSTON — There's Jesus the distant symbol, and Jesus the gentle friend. There's Jesus the pacifist and caregiver, and Jesus the gruff, muscular warrior.

There's black Jesus, and white Jesus. Homely and handsome, capitalist and socialist, stern and hippie. Hardworking social reformer, mystical comforter.

Readers looking for the one

true Jesus won't find him in two new books about Jesus in America. Instead, they will discover the extraordinary range of identities Jesus has assumed in American history and culture — in art, music, literature and more — over the past four centuries.

The first, "Jesus in America: A History," by University of Southern California historian Richard Wightman Fox, explores the ways Americans have experienced Jesus,

what they believed about him and what he inspired them to do. He tracks Jesus' influence on key events in American history: the Revolution, the Enlightenment, the social activism of the 1960s.

The second, Boston University Professor Stephen Prothero's "American Jesus: How the Son of God Became a National Icon," reflects the even broader interests of its author, a scholar of Asian religions who was intrigued

by the extent to which he found non-Christian Americans fascinated by Jesus. Even the Dalai Lama has written books about Jesus.

"I kept running into Jesus when I was trying to study Hindus and Buddhists," said Prothero, who was partly inspired to write the book after coming across a portrait of a meditating Jesus while visiting a Hindu temple in San Francisco.

See SCHOLARS/7B

CHURCH NEWS

February 19
The Mecklenburg County Missionary Union of the Women's Baptist Home and Foreign Missionary Convention will be held at 1303 Hawthorne Lane.

February 21
Winston-Salem State University Concert Choir will perform at Friendship Missionary Baptist church at 3301 Beatties Ford Road.

• Greater Mount Moriah

Primitive Baptist Church will hold an Adult Lecture at 4 p.m. on "From the Pyramids to the Ghetto" by Ahmad Daniels and a youth lecture "Building Self-Esteem in Our Youth" at 5 p.m. by Doris Frazier.

February 23
Silver Mount Baptist Church at 501 West Arrowood Road will hold a special campaign service to elect Rev. Franklyn Richardson as the next President of

the National Baptist Convention at 7 p.m.

February 26-28
Second Calvary Baptist Church will sponsor a Music Ministry Workshop.

February 28
Greater Mount Moriah Primitive Baptist Church will hold its Black History Celebration at 5 p.m.

February 25
Ash Wednesday Service will be held at Friendship Baptist Church at 7 p.m.

February 28
The North Carolina Baptist Ushers Convention one-day session will be held at M.G. Benton Convention Center at 301 West 5th Street, Winston-Salem at 8 a.m. Registration is \$10.

February 29
Friendship Missionary Baptist Church at 3301 Beatties Ford Road will hold its Fifth Sunday Hymnsing: A Celebration of Our Heritage-Metered Hymns &



Change is always constant — and good

"The only thing that is constant is change" is a cliché that has haunted me my whole life.

Although change is unavoidable, I still found myself fighting a no-win battle with the inevitable until now.

I realize now that not only should I stop fighting change, I should begin to embrace it because change is the only way I can ever fully achieve my purpose in life.

I wasn't ready to receive that truth until something very traumatic happened to me. God flipped my world upside down before I would accept that simple truth. In John 18:37 Jesus says: "Everyone on the side of truth listens to me." If I had been real with myself and been a true lover of truth, I would have been able to read that a particular season in my life must come to an end.

As I pondered my change over the weekend I couldn't fathom why would I reject a change for the good. It wasn't until I watched the "Primetime" interview with Mel Gibson did I receive my answer. Gibson said that pain is the precursor of change. And he is correct.

Pain is exactly why people like me don't want change even when it's good. We allow the natural man that always wants to be comfortable to take over instead of listening to the spiritual man that will remind us change must occur one way or another.

Everything that is growing must change. And since I have crossed over from death to life in Jesus Christ I must embrace the fact no matter how uncomfortable it makes me.

Nothing lives or can grow in stagnant water. That's why human beings die from the inside out when they don't change.

Self-loathing and disrespect from others are only a couple of the residuals for being complacent. A man isn't going to be rewarded for being controlled by fear. Fear shows our lack of faith in God. Being fearful of change and moving forward with our lives is equivalent to us saying "God I don't trust you with the next step of my life so I'm going to stay put."

When fearful of change, I pick up my Bible and turn to Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 because in these scriptures the author speaks so candidly on how it's a time for everything — even change.

