

# 'The Passion' is a hit among Arabs

By Nadia Abou El-Magd  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

CAIRO, Egypt — Hanan Nsour, a veiled, 21-year-old Muslim in Jordan, came out of "The Passion of the Christ" in tears and pronounced her verdict: Mel Gibson's crucifixion epic "unmasked the Jews' lies and I hope that everybody, everywhere, turns against the Jews."

The Quran, though, says Jesus's crucifixion never happened.

Such are the contradictions that are welling up as the Arab world deals with "The Passion," even as the film draws large audiences in Jordan, Syria, Lebanon and other Arab countries that have approved it for screening.

In the Arab world, openly voiced anti-Semitism — and by extension the warm reception for "The Passion" — is bound up in the Arab conflict with Israel. Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat, after watching the film at his compound in the West Bank, was quoted by an aide as likening Jesus' suffering to the Palestinians'.

When the 1998 animated movie "Prince of Egypt" reached Cairo, censors banned it. One reason given: Islam reveres Moses as a prophet, and many Muslims recoil at seeing their prophets portrayed as flesh-and-blood characters.

Jesus is also a prophet to the Muslims, yet "The Passion" was OK'd by Egypt's censors with no changes. They have not explained why "The Passion" was allowed.

Governments and Islamic clerics are also sending mixed signals.

Kuwait bans any movies depicting any of the prophets recognized by Islam, but one of its top Shiite clerics, Ayatollah Mohammed Baqer al-Mehri, has urged an exception for "The Passion"

because it "reveals crimes committed by Jews against Christ." The government has not yet made a decision on his call.

The dean of Kuwait University's Islamic Law College, Mohammed al-Tabtabai, has ordered Muslims to shun "The Passion" on the grounds that Jesus is a prophet.

In Jordan, a leader of the hard-line Islamic Action Front says Muslims should read the Quran or pray instead of watching movies, but he doesn't mind "The Passion" being screened in his country.

"The Jews are the most upset with the movie because it reveals their crimes against the prophets, the reformers and whoever contradicts their opinions," Hamza Mansoor said.

And in Egypt, the head of a department at Al-Azhar University that often advises the censors on these matters also is taking a hands-off approach.

"My understanding is that it is about the last 12 hours in the life of the Christ, which involve Christians

and Jews. Muslims have nothing to do with that," said Sheik Abdel Zaher Mohammed Abdel-Razeq.

The Quran, Islam's holy book, is unequivocal in sura (chapter) 4, verse 157: "They said 'We killed Christ Jesus the son of Mary, the Messenger of Allah' — but they killed him not, nor crucified him. But so it was made to appear to them. And those who differ therein are full of doubts with no knowledge, but only conjecture to follow, for of a surety they killed him not."

Muslims believe another man was crucified in Jesus's place.

Many in the West accuse director Gibson of reviving the Jews-killed-Christ claim that has stoked anti-Semitism through the ages.

"The Passion" is also being welcomed by the Middle East's Christian communities. Some Egyptian churches and Christian bookshops were selling pirated versions of "The Passion" for less than a dollar even before the film opened here.

In the United Arab Emirates, a Gulf News editorial extolled the film for being "so close to the human condition

in its depiction of betrayal, greed, falsehood, forgiveness and love. As Pope John Paul II has put it, 'It is as it was!'"

The Vatican denies the pope ever endorsed the movie with those words, and kept out of the controversy. But Cardinal Nasrallah Sfeir, head of the Maronite church in Lebanon, waded right in.

"It is not exaggerated and portrays reality as it is. It is a very sad film and we did not feel there was any anti-Semitism there," Sfeir told reporters after watching the film at a private screening.

Part of the film is spoken in Aramaic, an ancient language still spoken by a small minority in Syria.

Salim Abraham, 37, a Christian journalist who speaks fluent Aramaic, said: "I was so very happy to see my language, for the first time ever, being spoken on the big screen and in such a powerful movie."

"I think there is nothing anti-Semitic in it," Abraham added. "It gives the facts as they are, though they may be slightly exaggerated in some instances."

## The Charlotte Post

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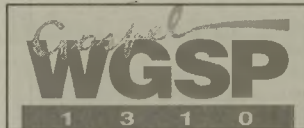
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J. M. LITTLE - TEACHER

I suggest you read the account there in Genesis 19 and see that God reprobated the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah, and all the cities of the plains except Zoar. God gave those inhabitants over to a reprobate mind to live not only in the sin of homosexuality, but the Apostle Jude says they were going after "strange flesh." (Jude 1:7). This strange flesh probably was nothing less than "fallen angels" again intruding into the human race as they did in Genesis 6 when God destroyed all flesh except Noah and his household. God reprobated those cities and destroyed the inhabitants with fire and brimstone from heaven.

My friends, can't you see God's hatred for sin?! Here of late we saw the Episcopal Church ordaining a "homosexual" man to the priesthood. What an abomination in the sight of God. It is a wonder to me that God doesn't open the earth and let this wicked generation go down into hell alive as He did Korah and Dathan in Numbers 16. My friends! The end is near! The Coming of the Lord draweth nigh! Where do you stand? Are you in Christ?

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