

Apocalypse with a Capital “M”

You’ve got to hand it to Mel Gibson, if nothing else, at least he’s consistent. In the shadow of such other apocalyptic epic features such as the *Ten Commandments*, he’s right in on it -- the enemy is a pagan empire and the victims’ trials and tribulations are never ending. The *Ten Commandments* god of vengeance was supposedly responsible for the plagues and tragedies of the Egyptians and a decadent society that refused to honor the directives of the Jewish god. Moses and the “pagan” tribes of Israel were given the chance to save themselves with a 40-year repentant trek through the desert.

The Spanish Crusaders, of course, were the supposed Christian saviors of the savage Mayas, both the victim hunters who supposedly burned each other’s villages and the barbaric Mayan empire and priesthood that supposedly sacrificed them to their pagan gods. Both had the final choice of either facing the Crusaders, or fleeing deep into the Jungle for another 430+ years for more supposed trials and tribulations, until the Christian missionaries finally caught up with them in the mid-1950s and converted them (the Lacondon Maya).

Mel’s final battle, which has yet to be made a major motion picture, showed its ugly face right after the completion of his *Apocalypto* feature film, with a full alcoholic backlash at the first and last of his hierarchy of pagans, the Jews. But Mel has yet to produce this last epic; his final battle, which he still can’t seem to resolve within himself. How does it end Mel, with a new heaven on Earth? Do we all get along?

Lest we diverge too far off the beaten path, let’s get back to the basic premise of the movie: Gibson has a dire need to resolve his shadow side which he still can’t seem to break through: he is an abused Catholic who like other abused Catholics, has swallowed the dogma hook, line, and sink. He can’t see beyond the demons of his Catholicism, which he grandly recreates from picture to picture, characterizing his antagonists as little more than heathens without souls. It’s like playing the old tape over and over again in an endless loop, and he can’t seem to find his way out. There’s war, violence, sex, shame, pain, suffering, hopelessness, morbidity, plague, fear, rage, gore, hatefulness, slavery, hysteria, mercilessness, vengefulness, vengeance, carnage, adversity, brutality and false pride. Whew!!! Man, that list just grows and grows!!! And as you watch the very antagonizing events unfold, at the rawest and lowest common denominator, you almost feel sorry for the guy. He just doesn’t seem able to appease his own tortured soul and plays out the same scenario, nightmare after nightmare, film after film. He desperately wants the antagonist to see the light but can’t seem to find what’s at the end of the tunnel. So he returns to the same nightmare over and over again, sort of like the myth of Sisyphus. It’s one trial and tribulation after another without resolve.

He sees natural functions and natural living as sinful, thus, constantly reinventing them, seeking ultimate redemption from nature’s calls. He plays on the sides of nature that he has yet to resolve, his own sexuality and his own shame. Being unable to do so in his own life, he tried suicide. So, are his films meant to serve as a catharsis for him?

The depiction of the Mayas was extremely shameful and totally unrealistic then and now, but the shame is really Mel's. The Mayan culture was a very complex culture and like the Egyptians and Romans, there was a very deep understanding of art, commerce, magic, nature and ritual. Their societies were not solely based on war and they made many alliances to build their empires. The Aztec and Mayan empires were also no different than the more current American and Roman (Papal) empires. Diplomacy generally outweighed the need for war, there was most certainly wheeling and dealing for economic gain, and their religious rituals may well have been symbolic, just as the Catholic ritual of drinking the blood and eating the body of Christ is symbolic.

The Aztec and Mayan empires succumbed to the violence of the Spanish Crusade in the name of Catholicism. Ironically, at that time, they were also awaiting the return of their god-king (Quetzalcoatl) who is a manifestation of Christ. Would Christ have slaughtered the Aztecs who put down their weapons and opened their homes to the so-called "Christians"? Instead, the brutality of the Crusade destroyed yet another civilization and its history. The Christians did a lot of slaughtering back in their days; not only of the Mayas. But the Christians successes are largely due to force and false pretense and they have yet to acknowledge their own shadow. And poor Mel cannot seem to find his happy ending because there is none. After killing off indigenous natives, pagans, and gnostic Christians, the Christian torch that Mel is carrying must be pretty heavy. What will be the final take for Mel? Will he be awarded in Heaven for being a Christian zealot and crusader who kills those (even if symbolically) who do not believe in his Christian god? Will the final showdown be a movie about the war between the Muslims and Jews, and the second coming? Is his own lack of peace a result of his having been unable to resolve his own hatred in his heart and soul?

The theme that Gibson follows is very biblical; resolution is through vengeance, and he continues to portray this vengeful side of his Lord. In biblical fashion, God will strike down those who bear witness to false gods and nature, and we must thus suffer through our sinful natures. He can't see beyond that one theme. He even goes as far as labeling Nature in the movie, as "the Goddess of the Scaffold who shows no mercy when men pray [to the female aspect] at the sacred Ceiba tree...only to eventually find themselves tormented in hell." Ah yes, there is one hopelessly more positive message thrown in; that perseverance, through pain and suffering, is the only way to salvation, a new life, and a new birth. Hmm...okay, so Mel is having a very painful rebirth, I hear you Mel. Facing one's shadow is not fun, is it? Yet, you still can't seem to break through to the other side. There is one epic left, Mel. Which will it be?

The Christian crusaders have yet to pay for the sins of their own corrupt empire. The shadow of the Roman Empire is still alive in the Catholic Church, which has filtered through the old Mesoamerican empires to modern day culture. Yet it still hasn't managed to understand why nature will always win and in the long-term functions as the great emancipator. Spirituality and adherence to cycles of nature are principles that Catholics and all fundamentalists refuse to acknowledge; thus, their downfall in the modern-day church. And it is this aspect of the divine that poor, tormented Mel still hasn't gotten.

The Mayas were no more bloody and violent than we are and most lived by natural cycles, which we don't. While Mel seems to understand that, he seems to be in denial of his own natural cycles, instead looking at a violent external model as the means to enforce peace rather than finding peace within through ones own ties to the Great Mother. And obviously, the Catholic Church still hasn't acknowledged the truth about Jesus' ministry and his teachings of the feminine. Heaven must come from within, not without, and it cannot be forced upon oneself or on others using fear and violence. But unfortunately, as we all face our collective shadows, those with the most to lose and the greatest darkness to transcend are those who have not yet fessed up to their own violent and carnal natures. And it's easier to blame other religions and cultures for what's wrong than look into your own shadow and make peace with it. So my question to Mel is, "if you feel compelled to continue to go into instant replay every time you do a movie, what will the next one be?" Will the Jews become the hunted or the hunter?

Without any doubt, the Christian crusaders were not and definitely still are not the salvation of the Mayas or the Western world. The Christian crusaders, be they Catholic or fundamentalist Baptists, and all of the western religions that have condoned war as a means to rectify their religion, are being forced to face their shadow now, while the descendents of those slain during previous crusades quietly wait for the second coming that will birth a great new consciousness.

Here's a thought to chew on Mel: It is a rule of thumb that the conquerors will always be conquered. But those who choose not to follow the beat of the war drum, those who choose to walk away from violence to protect their own, those who value community and show tolerance for those different from us, will be the winners. That was the end of the story that you missed, Mel. For whatever the reason, you didn't follow through. We all have to figure it out Mel, but the Catholic sin vs. redemption theme, with all its unresolved fears of natural functions and cravings, just doesn't cut it. If you believe you're a sinner by nature, you will never have hope and you'll never see the light because nature is a function of your being. You must face and resolve your dark fears to discover what's on the other side. Maybe then, you will finally see the brave new world and be able to write the final ending. *Apocalypto* is not about the Mayas Mel, it's exclusively about you, with a capital "M".