

“The Passion” Through



Jewish Eyes

Glad You Asked!

Dear Sarah,

I received the following exhortation from a ministry I support. I think it is an important message. Don't you think it is the Jew's own fault that Christians are against them when they continue to operate in the spirit of anti-Christ? Trying to stop this important movie (The Passion) is only making people turn against them. I think you should publish this prophetic teaching since Jewish Voice reaches so many Jews - maybe they will take the warning seriously and repent. -- R.P., NY

The message that RP was referring to contained the following quotes:

“The opposition to the movie, The Passion, was from the same source that persecuted the Lord Himself... was manifested in the power that had seized control of the Jewish nation at the time of Jesus... It was probably those who came out against the movie in the way they did who fueled more anti-Semitism... Many began to perceive it was the same spirit that persecuted Jesus, and it was... extremist groups came across as having the very nature of the Jewish leaders who were the villains in the movie and in history because they were of that spirit... The extremist anti-Christian Jews... who claim to be defending against anti-Semitism are themselves driving many to anti-Semitism by their tactics. This extremist group comes across like the very embodiment of the spirit ...that was the greatest persecutor of Jesus Himself, just as it is in this important movie about Him. Many who have been true friends of the Jewish people have been offended by the Jewish response to The Passion. Others are raising questions about the Jewish control of Hollywood, the news media, and other such things that seem

to be used to attack Mel Gibson, and this movie...Gibson himself said, 'Critics who have a problem with me don't really have a problem with me in this film. They have a problem with the four Gospels' ...fears that it will release anti-Semitism are completely unfounded."

Dear R.P.,

Thank you for sending this information and allowing me the opportunity to respond.

I found this very troubling, and am concerned of the impact it may have on many Believers. To be fair, in the original message, the writer does warn against becoming anti-Semitic by "judging an entire race by its most extremist elements" and tells the reader of the history of anti-Semitism from the Church. However, his own epithets and judgments are what carry the most weight, as he denounces any Jew that would speak against the movie

as being disingenuous and anti-Christ. It is a dangerous precedent to set, equating criticism of the movie or producer with being against Yeshua (Jesus), and the Gospels. It's simply not true.



Poster for Passion Play Portrays Jews with Satanic Horns

It is also unfair and ungracious to dismiss fears that the Jewish community may have as unfounded. It's reasonable that the people best equipped to judge that potential would be those that lived through the Holocaust, who experienced the subtle changes in their society that paved the way for overt anti-Semitism to rise, first to public acceptance, (by using exactly such characterizations as those quoted - especially fears of "Jewish control" over the society), then to restrictive laws against the Jews, and ultimately to a

policy of annihilation. The concentration camps of Europe did not spring up overnight. Tolerance of such a heinous policy came as a result of subtly influencing sentiment by sowing seeds of suspicion, doubt, and hatred, labeling an entire race of people as ungodly and anti-Christ.

The writer says that “many who have been true friends of the Jewish people have been offended by the Jewish response to *The Passion*” If one is a true friend to begin with, one would find compassion and grace for those that have spoken out of fear and hurt from centuries of persecution.

If one would look “*through Jewish eyes,*” there are many aspects of this production that we can understand have given rise for Jewish concern. Please don’t take this as a criticism of the movie, rather, I’m hoping to help you see the elements that led to Jewish concern, to dispel the sentiment that it arose from anti-Christian bias.

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I. **The Passion Play**, historically, has provoked hatred and brutality against the Jews. This genre was used powerfully throughout history to manipulate the masses. People would be driven to fanatic hysteria over “*the murder of God by the Jews,*” who were portrayed as the embodiment of evil. Hitler was inspired by the power of the famous Oberammergau Passion Play, seeing it as a “precious tool” in “the fight against the Jews.” That famous play, however, has changed its format to conform to guidelines established in 1988 by the Catholic Church under Vatican II for *Responsible Dramatization of the Passion*. Yet, a National Conference of Catholic Bishops has issued a detailed report on this film in protest, as it does not abide by those safeguards. One Catholic theologian from the group called the script “one of the more anti-Semitic documents most of us have seen in a long time.”

The Jewish people are not “against” Gibson because he is a Christian, please understand, it is the medieval, anti-Semitic traditions embodied in the Tridentine institution that foster concern.

Added to this, his father, who shares his zeal for overturning V-II, is openly anti-Semitic and part of an active group that claims the Holocaust never happened.

example, before V-II, the Good Friday Mass contained the line “let us pray for the perfidious Jews who killed our Lord Jesus Christ.” This has been removed from the modern liturgy, but not from the services of those who reject V-II. The Jewish people are not “against” Gibson because he is a Christian, please understand, it is the medieval, anti-Semitic traditions embodied in the Tridentine institution that foster concern. Added to this, his father, who shares his zeal for overturning V-II, is openly anti-Semitic and part of an active group that claims the Holocaust never happened. It took many interviews to finally get his son to make a statement acknowledging the Holocaust.

3. **The source material** used. Troubling also is the

2. There was distrust of **the Producer**. It was worrisome to the Jewish people that Gibson did not abide by the criteria, and that he is part of a sect of Catholics that reject the reforms of Vatican II, as well as rejecting the current Pope, who has ended the official antipathy of the Catholic Church toward the Jews, renouncing the charge of deicide, and even removing centuries’ old liturgies of hatred. For

Troubling also is the material used for imagery and information in the movie, from Anne Catherine Emmerich, a medieval mystic. Her writings are viciously anti-Semitic. It is distressing that these previously forgotten books are now flying off the shelves. Worrisome, is the fact that great numbers of people will be reading hateful epithets, descriptions, and accusations against the Jews. Worse, these medieval charges of God’s “endless curse against the cruel Jews” are supposed to be directly from God. It is very frightening to read if you are Jewish.

material used for imagery and information in the movie, from Anne Catherine Emmerich, a medieval mystic. Her writings are viciously anti-Semitic. Although not many of her words are used in the dialogue of the movie, a great deal of imagery was. Such images as the destruction of the Temple (as a sign of God being finished with the Jews according to her visions) are among the the many scenes used from her book “*The Dolorous Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ.*” It is distressing that these previously forgotten books are now flying off the shelves. Worrisome, is the fact that great numbers of people will be reading hateful epithets, descriptions, and accusations against the Jews. Worse, these medieval charges of God’s “endless curse against the cruel Jews” are supposed to be directly from God. It is very frightening to read if you are Jewish.

In her writings, Emmerich gives an account of having saved a Jewish woman on one of her visits to purgatory, who confessed to her that the Jews kill Christian children to use their blood in their Passover matzo. Yet, Emmerich is called “venerable,” a title conferred only on those deemed as holy and faithful. So, her writings, although many would say are ridiculous, do carry authority. Jewish people find it worrisome that Mel Gibson could revere

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This is why the Passion Play genre has been such a volatile medium.

these writings and not be put off by the unbiblical hatred against the Jews. And if he accepts this, *how many more will?* Jewish people would naturally be alarmed. And it’s not only Jews, but the US Conference of Catholic Bishops submitted a study pointing out the departures in the script from the Gospels, as well as the “*lurid details from ecstatic visions*” as problematic.

4. This **type of production** – inasmuch as the biblical text contains less than 20 lines about this 12 hour period, the viewer has no context to understand the enormity and complexities of the issue. A common observation has been that Jesus appears to simply be the innocent victim of a senseless and

brutal murder at the hands of an evil and angry *Jewish* mob. This is why the Passion Play genre has been such a volatile medium. Whereas the Bible focuses on the Resurrection, and gives little information of the brutal details of the suffering, the Passion Play leaves the viewer filled with grief, anger, and *passion*, without the whole story, and without the victory of Resurrection.

To say that the Jews “*have a problem with the four Gospels*” is unfair and prejudicial. By carving out a tiny portion of the Bible narrative, a producer must add to the Bible, or the production would only be a few minutes in length, so this film is not simply the Gospels. The beautiful movie “*The Gospel of John*” was in production at nearly the same time as *The Passion*. There was no criticism or concern over it, as it used only the Bible narrative - *in its entirety*.

World anti-equal to, or prior to the American Jews trust Christians allies. Fearing on the cusp of of anti-have appealed



Semitism is now greater than, just Holocaust. Many have come to as their greatest that we may be a terrifying wave Semitism, some to the Christian

community to understand their fear that the movie may inspire anger. They had hoped that their concerns would be met with understanding.

Mel Gibson and Jim Caviezel on the set of *The Passion of the Christ*

I would hope we would minister to these fears graciously, rather than condemn. We have the opportunity to build bridges and overcome centuries of damage.

Jewish Voice has experienced an unprecedented amount of anti-Semitic mail and calls with the release of the movie. Jewish organizations have also experienced an “alarming rise” in hateful mail making reference to the movie. On the internet also, there are frightening anti-Semitic writings posted to Christian “bulletin boards,” and Christian websites angrily reviling the Jews over this movie. This fanaticism is reminiscent of past anti-Semitism. *It was certainly not the intent of the film maker, and does not glorify God.*

Please be wary of entertaining judgment against fellow human beings in devotion for a movie. And please remember that the phrase “the Jews killed Christ” is untrue. The truth is: a fraction of the Jews rejected Jesus, and some called for His execution, but the Bible records that *TENS OF THOUSANDS* [Jews] in Jerusalem alone, who were zealous for the Torah, followed Him ... *AND took the Gospel message to the Nations.* (Acts 21:20)

Also remember, that Jesus was not murdered – He made it clear that no man had the power to take His life – He laid it down of His own accord – *out of love.* (Jn. 10:17, 18)

Above all remember, JESUS IS NOT DEAD – HE IS ALIVE!

And it is in this that we have eternal life!

Sarah

Reprinted from Jewish Voice Today May/June 2004 magazine
“Why So Much Passion Over THE PASSION?” Read it
online:

