

Some Jewish Reactions to Mel Gibson's "The Passion of the Christ"

Jews generally affirm Mel Gibson's right of artistic license. They also realize that many Christians will experience his controversial film differently from the way many Jews will view it. To foster mutual understanding, the following explains why some Jews feel discomfited or will find the film objectionable:

- 1 In significant departure from gospel testimony, Mr. Gibson draws heavily on mystical visions by a nineteenth century German nun (Anne Catherine Emmerich). The pervasive tenor of his movie as well as aspects of his personal theology -- and above all many scenes where Jesus is tortured by Jews and where other characters are assigned anti-Semitic actions or expletives -- all of these are directly and demonstrably inspired by this nun (who had no expertise in first century history). <http://www.emmerich1.com/DOLOROUS_PASSION_OF_OUR_LORD_JESUS_CHRIST.htm>
- 2 While Mr. Gibson has often praised his production as the most historically reliable ever made, he knows little of, or ignores, a century of recent Christian New Testament scholarship concerning what led to Jesus' death, and has restricted his consultants to those similarly disposed.
- 3 Mr. Gibson's powerful influence could have the effect of undercutting four decades of advances in Christian-Jewish relations, an arena in which our community prides itself. (Already, the film has polarized some who otherwise used to engage in friendly and relaxed discourse with one another.)
- 4 Mr. Gibson refuses to take seriously enough the historical cause-and-effect relationship between European Passion plays and ensuing trauma, even death, literally to countless Jews. Hitler himself used the Oberammergau Passion Play (in Bavaria) to indoctrinate Nazis as to why Jews as a people had to be exterminated. The Holocaust alone (whose Jewish dimensions Mr. Gibson has seemed reluctant fully to accept) explains why Passion plays are so "radioactive" for the Jewish psyche.
- 5 The movie radiates the potential of jeopardizing the welfare of Jews abroad, where images consistent with, even duplicative of, some of those in Mr. Gibson's film have been customarily appropriated and readily employed as vehicles for conveying anti-Semitism.
- 6 DVDs of the film, in video chains, libraries, as well as Christian religious school curricula, could poison the minds of some Christians (especially children) toward Jews of Jesus' time, if not also toward Jews of today and tomorrow.
- 7 Mr. Gibson's "over-the-top" fascination with torture (also aided by ideas drawn from Emmerich) likewise reinforces the very "unchristian" values and vile violence pervading our secular culture -- by which so many Christians claim to feel assaulted today (which aversion many Jews likewise share).
- 8 The rage and name-calling already generated by the film are inconsistent with the dawning of the Jewish Kingdom of God so ardently anticipated by Jesus through his own (Pharisaic) parables.

Nonetheless, the Jewish community remains committed to the pursuit of wholesome interfaith relations, and hopes that heartfelt dialogue over this film may somehow yet engender new progress toward mutual understanding and toward the Messianic Age conceptualized and bequeathed to the world by Jewish tradition.