



Statement on Mel Gibson's The Passion of the Christ

24.02.2004 | Christian Jewish Dialogue in Montreal (CJDM)

Like all art works based on historical events, Mel Gibson's film The Passion of the Christ may create the illusion that it faithfully reproduces the details of Jesus' Passion with its cruelty and violence. Viewers may be left with the impression that without the Jews, these things never would have happened.

Like all art works based on historical events, Mel Gibson's film The Passion of the Christ may create the illusion that it faithfully reproduces the details of Jesus' Passion with its cruelty and violence. Viewers may be left with the impression that without the Jews, these things never would have happened. We, members of the Christian Jewish Dialogue in Montreal, are concerned that this rendering of the Passion may foster misunderstandings between Christians and Jews and nourish anti-Semitism.

While the events in the Passion are central to Christian faith, elements of their portrayal, particularly in popular passion plays, have often been theologically and morally as well as historically problematic. Whatever the intentions of their producers, such plays have tended to portray Jews collectively as killers of Christ. They have fomented hatred and violence toward Jews. We hope this film will not leave impressions supporting such attitudes.

In the wake of the Holocaust (the Shoah), and in the light of scholarly research, the Roman Catholic Church and all major Protestant denominations have officially rejected the accusation of deicide and collective Jewish guilt for the death of Jesus. Today, where there is ample evidence that anti-Semitism is on the rise, these teachings take on new urgency.

We call on Christian leaders in the Montreal area to affirm publicly their churches' current teachings on appropriate portrayals and interpretations of the Passion and to make these teachings readily available to the general public. We urge the film's viewers to evaluate it as one perspective on the Passion, and to form their own opinions based on study of the gospels enlightened by the insights of biblical scholars today. We encourage all people to recognize the concerns that this film raises, and to respond with justice, honesty and compassion. These attitudes have made possible the enormous progress in Christian-Jewish relations over the past forty years.

Jean Duhaime, CJDM president, February 25, 2004

The Christian - Jewish Dialogue of Montreal is a group of representatives of different sponsoring organizations, duly incorporated as a not-for-profit corporation, who meet on a regular basis in order to build and strengthen trust between Christian and Jewish communities.

The following websites provide useful informations on this topic:

Canadian Jewish Congress: www.cjc.ca

Christian Jewish Learning Center at Boston College: www.bc.edu/research/cjl

Communications et Société, formerly at: www.officecom.qc.ca/GibsonPassion.html.