



U.S. Groups Express Concerns about "Passion of Christ"; Film

05.01.2004

Ongoing concerns about how Jews and Judaism may be depicted in the forthcoming film "The Passion of Christ," directed by the well known Hollywood actor Mel Gibson, have prompted statements by groups in the United States concerned with interfaith relations. The Council of Centers on Jewish-Christian Relations, a coordinating council of 25 such centers, in a statement dated January 3, 2004, points out that "while the events of the Passion are central to Christian faith, elements of their portrayal, particularly in popular Passion Plays, have often been theologically and morally problematic. Specifically, their portrayal of Jews collectively as killers of Christ has historically fomented hatred and violence toward Jews." Noting that all major church bodies have repudiated this charge, the statement urges church leaders to reaffirm these teachings, and asks all people to "seek to model the behaviors of justice, honesty, and compassion that have led to the enormous progress in Christian-Jewish relations in the past forty years."

The Consultative Panel on Lutheran-Jewish Relations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, in a statement issued January 6, 2004, notes that "the portrayal of the Passion of Jesus is one of the most difficult subjects in the history of Jewish-Christian relations. Whenever and however it is told, the Passion sets the Jew Jesus, his Jewish disciples, other Jewish leaders, a larger Jewish community of considerable diversity, a Roman governor, Roman soldiers, and God in a complex web of relationships." The Panel notes that official Lutheran statements clearly assert that "the New Testament must not be used as justification for hostility towards present-day Jews" and that "blame for the death of Jesus should not be attributed to Judaism or the Jewish people." Regarding the forthcoming film, the Panel declares: "Recognizing his stature and influence as a film producer and celebrity, we can expect that Mr. Gibson's project will shape or reshape understandings of this central Christian story for millions of viewers. It is imperative that such influence be exercised with due regard for the powerful heritage of the Passion as gospel truth for Christians and as human tragedy for many Jews."

F.S.

[Lutheran statement](#)