

An Agonising Choice

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The two movies are somewhat similar symptoms of the same serious malaise in Western society: the widespread loss of confidence in its secular moral values. Both are personal statements made by charming rogues who have a sense of humour, are very good at their jobs, and are driven by a core of gibbering hatred. Both peddle incendiary falsehoods that have caused murder and destruction beyond measure, been a blight on every kind of progress and will undoubtedly do a great deal more harm before they are extirpated.

Ignore them. Follow **Gil's** reasonable example and watch *Team America*.

Sun, 10/17/2004 - 17:18 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permlink](#)

Team America rocks

interview about the movie. v good. they are on our side.

nice post.

-- Elliot Temple

<http://www.curi.us/>

by **Elliot Temple** on Sun, 10/17/2004 - 18:43 | [reply](#)

Forced

Don't agree about *The Passion*; I did not see whatever you saw in it. Not saying it was my favorite film of the year (*Team America* has a reasonable shot - can't wait to see it!) or even that I liked it all that much (I'm pretty sure I liked, for example, *"Mean Girls"* better :), but the "hatred" parallel you attempt to set up between it and *F9/11* rings false and seems forced. Just cuz both films are

controversial doesn't make them equivalent parallel mirror images

of each other.

But this discrepancy often arises because I actually watched the movie and whoever I'm talking to did not. Telling part of the article you link: "A lot of older Academy voters, who are largely Jewish, refuse to even see this movie". It's probably easy to decide a movie is "antisemitic" if you don't watch it. I know the antisemitic history of passion plays and all but um if I judge the movie based on, like, its own terms and not thinking about other stuff (besides, you know, the actual movie)... I just don't see it.

Did you watch it? Bombastic yes, antisemitic?... sorry I just don't get it. Story took place amongst a bunch of Jews, some good some bad... so what? --Blix

by a reader on Sun, 10/17/2004 - 20:34 | [reply](#)

Re: Forced

Say some thugs attack a non-Jewish hook-nosed guy in an alley, shouting "Hepp! Hepp!", and carve a swastika on his face. Someone who wasn't aware of certain memes might say: "criminal, yes; antisemitic? ... sorry I just don't get it". Anyone who *is* aware of those memes would know for certain that this is the very heart and soul of antisemitism in action.

by [Editor](#) on Sun, 10/17/2004 - 21:10 | [reply](#)

hmm

No seriously. Have you seen the film? It's nothin' like that --Blix

by a reader on Sun, 10/17/2004 - 23:50 | [reply](#)

Blix - are you...

Blix - are you saying that the events in the film are nothing like the events in the Editor's comment "Re: forced" above? That would be a misreading.

Or are you saying that the film is not based with loving and admiring fidelity on Emmerich's book? Or that Emmerich's book is not part of the ancient pattern of antisemitism?

I have not watched the movie because I have read enough of Emmerich's book to know that I don't want to. **Check it out.**

by [David Deutsch](#) on Mon, 10/18/2004 - 00:51 | [reply](#)

3cents

i haven't watched any michael moore movies, but i know they are bad. don't have to watch to know that.

or, before I saw Mean Girls, i knew I was gonna like it. then when i

watched it three times I did.

-- Elliot Temple
<http://www.curi.us/>

by **Elliot Temple** on Mon, 10/18/2004 - 01:43 | [reply](#)

the passion is anti-semitic

Don't agree about The Passion; I did not see whatever you saw in it.

"I do not see anti-semitism here" is an argument from ignorance, which is a fallacy. That you don't know a reason to think something doesn't argue in the slightest it's false.

If you want to argue it's not anti-semitic, you must first find out the specific charges (learn the argument that it *is*) and then criticise that. In this case the argument it's anti-semitic is that it's a passion play in the grand tradition of anti-semitic passion plays. to refute this, you can explain how it's not a passion play (in the sense of the tradition not name) (good luck :D), explain how the tradition isn't anti-semitic, or come up with something else.

as for the argument that the plays are anti-semitic, so you can engage with and refute it if you like, **The World** posted about it [here](#). the link for passion plays in particular is [this](#). also The Passion was based off Emmerich's book in part, and Emmerich says in very short that jews killed jesus, became cursed, and were themselves at fault for all this. also that the jews were evil, and that this evil transmits itself to babies so it'll last through the generations.

-- Elliot Temple
<http://www.curi.us/>

by **Elliot Temple** on Mon, 10/18/2004 - 02:36 | [reply](#)

heh

DD,

"are you saying that the events in the film are nothing like the events in the Editor's comment "Re: forced" above? That would be a misreading."

Heh. That it would be. No I'm not. I'm saying The Passion is not analogous to that example. What I meant by this is that the example contains elements that are recognizably antisemitic but this (maybe..) needs to be explained. However having thought about it most of those elements don't even need to be explained. Anyway, The Passion (the movie (ITSELF)) does not contain analogous elements, whether explainable or not. (I've heard some attempted explanations and consider them bogus.)

I might listen to your attempts at rebutting my assertion that said

explanations (of why elements X Y Z of The Passion are antisemitic) are bogus but, alas, as you have not seen the film, you're not in a position to do it....

I have not read the Emmerich book. I'm judging the film (ITSELF).

Elliot (and DD),

It sounds to me as if you simply wouldn't think it is possible to tell the story of "the passion" (=a certain rather short period in the life of the literary character "Jesus"), i.e. make a "passion play", without being antisemitic. If not, then fine, I admit that The Passion is antisemitic under that standard, a standard I'm not very interested in.

If it is possible to tell a non-antisemitic "passion" story (by your standard), how would one go about doing it?

--Blix

by a reader on Mon, 10/18/2004 - 04:00 | [reply](#)

P.S. (not T.S.) Elliot

BTW "I saw the movie and did not find it antisemitic" is not an argument from ignorance despite my perhaps poor choice of words which gave you that opening. I am not ignorant of it having been antisemitic, I have knowledge of it NOT being antisemitic, namely from having seen it, which many of those who are calling it antisemitic ("less ignorant" than I, apparently?) haven't. If I see your red shirt and say "gee that doesn't look blue to me" am I "arguing from ignorance"?

I've heard and read many of the arguments as to why The Passion is antisemitic and found them bogus, like I said. Interestingly, it's not necessary for me rebut those arguments here, because none such have been advanced by anyone, not in this post nor in the prior post you linked. There is an argument that "Matthew"'s author, or at least the later author/insertor of a certain infamous line, had antisemitic intent, and an argument that some chick named Emmerich was obsessed with antisemitic thoughts, neither of which I dispute. There is no argument, there or here, that the film "The Passion of the Christ" is antisemitic. There is an assertion. Onus is not on me but on the asserters. Which will be - or should be - hard to do without having seen the movie.

It's easy to do however if your standard for antisemitism is "if it's a passion play [=tells the story of JC's last day] it's antisemitic".

by a reader on Mon, 10/18/2004 - 07:51 | [reply](#)

compare and contrast

<http://web.israelinsider.com/...>

><http://www.womentodaymagazine.com/contact/antisemitic.html>

-- Elliot Temple

<http://www.curi.us/>

by **Elliot Temple** on Mon, 10/18/2004 - 18:08 | [reply](#)

I have actually seen the movi

I have actually seen the movie and to me it was indeed anti-semitic: Stereo-typical Jews (with hooked nose and kippa) taking bribes to give false witness against Jesus, a group of blood thirsty psychopathic priests who, for no apparent reason but their innate vengefulness, keep on asking for Jesus' death to the very end despite Jesus' bloody and injured condition (itself much exaggerated compared to the account in the Gospels), the faces of the priests and their hypocritical soft talk to the Romans in charge, a very kind and benevolent Pilate looking desperately for "truth" and having to deal with a bloodthirsty Jewish rabble in complete contrast to real historical accounts, well known antisemitic symbolisms like showing Satan repeatedly walking among the Jews-his people(?), the famous "his blood be on us and our children" line that was still there, left without a subscript only at the pressure of ADL....

I come from Iran. So I think I know what I'm talking about when it comes to these things. I have seen many propaganda TV series depicting Zionists, Freemasons etc. This film was disturbingly similar to them.

Actually a couple of years ago the Iranian regime had made a TV series about Mary and the infant Jesus. There you also had evil Jews always in defiance of God's will, but even THEY had the Jewish authorities divided in two opposing camps, one benevolent and moral and the other evil predecessors of Zionism or whatever. (It was filled with historical mistakes, priests and rabbis were all mixed up so the two camps were based on those of Hillel and Shammai as Temple priests!)

My point is that Mel Gibson's film lacked even this. (unless you want to count one or two ordinary Jews who weren't THAT bad...put there as embellishments I guess.)

AIS

by a reader on Mon, 10/18/2004 - 19:59 | [reply](#)

How the West is lost...

I wrote this at presenceofmind.net, but I'm posting it here, also.

Greg Swann

How the West is lost...

Citing a dumb [MSNBC article](#) (Drudge had it, too), David Deutsch of [Setting the World to Rights](#) offers this:

This year's Academy Award for Best Motion Picture is

thought to be likely to be awarded either to Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* or to Michael Moore's *Fahrenheit 9/11*. It will be an agonising choice for the Academy, involving a rare conflict between the two great principles -- antisemitism and idiotarianism -- that currently trump every other consideration in the minds of the fashionable.

The two movies are somewhat similar symptoms of the same serious malaise in Western society: the widespread loss of confidence in its secular moral values. Both are personal statements made by charming rogues who have a sense of humour, are very good at their jobs, and are driven by a core of gibbering hatred. Both peddle incendiary falsehoods that have caused murder and destruction beyond measure, been a blight on every kind of progress and will undoubtedly do a great deal more harm before they are extirpated.

Privately, by email to Sarah Fitz-Claridge, whom I had thought had written the piece, I wrote:

> Both [.....] are driven by a core of gibbering hatred.

This is beneath you. You have no evidence of gibbering hatred in Gibson and no shortage from Moore. This is moral relativism at its worst. Whatever Gibson's faults may be, he is motivated by nothing but benevolent ends. And whatever Moore's virtues, if any, his objectives are openly malevolent. Even taking account that neither film will attract any Oscar votes--why would that matter? are you misled or just counting coup?--this is a completely invalid comparison.

[snipped]

It is not necessary to insist that Gibson is right about anything to understand that, by grouping him with Moore, you are crediting an unearned merit to Moore.

It was Sarah who told me that the author was David Deutsch. In the mean time, I had these further thoughts:

The best-light form of the equation is:

life-loving small-l libertarian film-maker carried away by his religious faith, who may have been influenced by an antique anti-semitist, produces a film that consists of a particularly gory *Stations of the Cross* with a particularly saccharine *Pieta* as coda, which film, contrary to hysterical predictions, has had zero negative consequences and may have had some salutary positive consequences, and has no movement-oriented or anti-civilization objectives whatever

equals

life-loathing Socialist propagandist desperate to deprive

honest but ignorant voters of their right to an informed consent by deliberately promoting vicious mis- and disinformation, thereby intentionally undermining American and allied troops in war and openly making common cause with the worst enemies Western civilization has ever known

This is an obviously invalid equation. When we despoil thought we despoil the very thing we have that our enemies lack. We surrender that which cannot ever be conquered.

I don't like the non-concepts "idiotarian" and "anti-idiotarian", a pair of junk drawers of the mind, but whatever the poster thinks--or doesn't think--about **The Passion**, Mel Gibson is beyond all doubt an important voice in the ancient and continuing war against tyranny. Not only does the poster elevate his undoubted enemies, he denigrates a true friend of liberty far more important than any of us. This would be nothing more than detestable snobbery if it did not effect by erosion the enemy's objectives.

The West will fall, if it does, not because it was knocked down from the outside, but because it was not held up from the inside. That little post, of less, even, than passing moment, is how that will be done.

I have defended *The Passion of the Christ* at length, not just because it is a great movie, but also because it is *not* an evil movie. It is a good deal less important to the cause of human liberty than **Braveheart** or **The Patriot**, but it is a good and valuable and important film. Moreover, Gibson's entire corpus is entirely benevolent, where Moore's is entirely malevolent. To compare these two men in any way at all is the kind of obscenity, that, if indulged, *will* contribute to the fall of the West.

by [gswann](#) on Mon, 10/18/2004 - 20:25 | [reply](#)

to AIS

"Stereo-typical Jews (with hooked nose and kippa)"

Apparently there are many many Jews who are Stereo-typical Jews (a former co-worker of mine could be described this way - great guy btw) and thus should not appear on movie screens being portrayed doing things. Kippa = yarmulke right? For crying out loud, you can't show a Jew wearing a yarmulke doing something bad?

"Jews... taking bribes to give false witness against Jesus"

I think you have in mind Judas (one character), although I'm not sure he "bore false witness" he just turned the wanted guy in, seems like that's bearing true witness to me. Anyway, why did you

use the plural? Apparently now if you portray a Jewish character in

a film doing a negative thing that's "antisemitic". This is precisely why I get annoyed by the complaint and argue against it BTW. It's so condescending. Look: Jews are people & are capable of doing bad things, like other people. To imply that all stories must pretend otherwise is to coddle Jews as like pets.

"a group of blood thirsty psychopathic priests who, for no apparent reason but their innate vengefulness, keep on asking for Jesus' death to the very end"

It wasn't for no apparent reason, it was for an obvious reason which was perfectly apparent: because Jesus had blasphemed against the Lord their God, had claimed to be the "messiah". Had I been a member of the Sanhedrin (which implies, living in that society, having the religious views they did, etc) I reckon I would have voted the exact same way and called for his death as well. The case against him was pretty clear-cut and his own testimony was all one needed. But anyway, let's stipulate that the audience will come away thinking that particular group of Jews (the pro-crucifixion faction of the Sanhedrin - remember, there was an anti-faction as well, they just lost the vote) was portrayed doing bad stuff/having bad feelings in this film.

Thing is, other Jews were portrayed doing good stuff/having good feelings in the exact same film. Again, this is because Jews are, you know, people, some of them good some bad.

"itself much exaggerated compared to the account in the Gospels"

The account in the Gospels is sketchy so there's no disputing that the film writer filled in details according to how he felt like. Any writer of this story would have to. Anyway so you're asserting (probably correctly) that the film exaggerated the extent to which a bunch of ROMAN soldiers (or perhaps Syrians working as Roman soldiers? not clear but historically many of them would have been Syrians AFAIK) scourged JC etc. and somehow this exaggeration is an example of... antisemitism?

"the faces of the priests and their hypocritical soft talk to the Romans in charge"

Explain hypocritical. I don't even see them as hypocritical to begin with. They were priests in a theocratic society being occupied by a pagan empire; thus they had a very difficult fence to straddle. Again, I'd probably have acted pretty much the same way in their place.

"a very kind and benevolent Pilate"

Again, like Judas, Pilate is one (1) character. Does the movie Forrest Gump accuse all Americans of being simpletons? (Hmm don't answer that :) Now, I understand perfectly well that in the Bible stories Pilate's role was probably soft-pedaled/gussied up for later, Roman audiences. I understand that this aspect of the story, like many other aspects, was used in antisemitic ways in passion plays. But I don't see "the Jewish priests wanted him executed and the Roman proconsul guy was a soul searching Hamlet", however

dubious historically (and literarily), as being antisemitic. This is because: I didn't see a problem with the Jewish priests' position (contextually) in the first place; Pilate came off like a cowardly bureaucrat; and I don't take either one of them to Represent The Races They Come From. And you really **can't** do this if you watch the whole movie, as I said there were Jews who **didn't** want JC to be killed, and Romans who were bloodthirsty monsters. Why pick on Pilate, and Caiphas, and say "the film's making The Romans look good and The Jews look bad" instead of picking on say Head Sadistic Roman Guard, and Jew Who Helps Carry Jesus's Cross, and say "the film's making The Romans look like monsters and The Jews look compassionate"?

Objectively I don't see why one would pick one interpretation over the other.

"bloodthirsty Jewish rabble in complete contrast to real historical accounts"

I don't know what "real historical accounts" there are of the Jesus Of Nazareth Case which you could be basing this on. The Bible story goes that there was some crowd outside the courthouse and they wanted Barabbas spared and not Jesus. This film portrays that story. BTW everyone assumes this was a "bloodthirsty Jewish rabble" but supposing such an incident really did take place no one here knows what would have been the demographic makeup of that particular crowd of some (200? 300?) people outside Pilate's offices. Could some have been Syrian? Ethiopian? Could there have been anti-Jesus plants in the or Roman instigators in the crowd? Sure. Could the crowd have been majority pro-Jesus but this was a silent majority? Sure. The leap from "that crowd wanted Barabbas" to "this says something bad about The Jews" is one that I simply don't make.

Maybe my problem is that I think to some extent antisemitism in a film/story depends on **two** people to exist, the one who writes the story and the one who hears the story and **interprets** it in antisemitic ways. Since I didn't, I don't see the problem... For the record I don't dispute that if you show this film in many parts of Arabia you'll get an antisemitic reaction.

"well known antisemitic symbolisms like showing Satan repeatedly walking among the Jews-his people(?)"

WTF? Who said "the Jews" are "his people"? Jesus was also walking amongst the Jews, and besides he WAS one, doesn't this outweigh the other?

"the famous "his blood be on us and our children" line that was still there"

"still there"? Well I guess.. it's "still" in the Bible after all. Granted perhaps the Bible is simply antisemitic and you simply can't tell this particular story therefore without being antisemitic or leaving out certain aspects of it found in the Bible. That seems to be what others here are saying, in which case, so be it.

"even THEY had the Jewish authorities divided in two opposing

camps ... My point is that Mel Gibson's film lacked even this."

No it didn't. At least in the film I saw it was evident that the Sanhedrin were divided, although obviously the "guilty" side won out.

Of course, again, I'm in a rather strange position because I too would've voted "guilty", I don't see why it's so shocking that an overt blasphemer would've been voted guilty by priests in such a society (ANY such society). Nor do I see why that reflects poorly on the race from which those priests come - or even on those priests themselves.

by a reader on Mon, 10/18/2004 - 21:01 | [reply](#)

Elliot, In what way am I m

Elliot,

In what way am I meant to compare and contrast those two articles?

The first one was - oh what's the word I'm looking for - stupid. Also hateful (far more "hateful" than The Passion IMHO). I stopped reading halfway through. It's junk.

As for the second article, I don't agree with its attempted arguments. It does not speak for me.

by a reader on Mon, 10/18/2004 - 21:09 | [reply](#)

OK. Let's see if I can make m

OK. Let's see if I can make my points more clear this time around. The issue was whether there were identifiable antisemitic symbols/stereotypes/stances...in the film which would make the film (deliberately?) antisemitic, besides the fact that the storyline is based on the Gospels. (Themselves already antisemitic in some parts(esp. Mathew and John))

I think it was. There are other films made about Jesus, and they all entail the trial, the role of Jewish priesthood and so on. So you can argue they all have some elements of antisemitism no matter what. This film however has gone beyond this limit and the examples I gave were to show this, so your arguments about the historic events or the Gospel connection are not really relevant.

Use of 'stereotypical "Jewish" look doing stereotypically "Jewish" things like taking bribes or coveting for money' is antisemitic. Jews like any other people have different looks. That particular look IS an old time antisemitic symbol. Just look at the cartoons in Der Streicher or today's arab media.

(And I didn't mean Judas, but others who were contacted in the middle of the night and hired by the Temple to come and testify, and there were more than one, hence my use of plural tense)
As for psychopathic priests, that was they way they were portrayed, the acting styles , the faces, the hateful use of language, the way

they readily chose Barabbas instead, their sometimes satisfied mostly indifferent and cold looks, while watching the most painful and inhuman torture. I think all you said about performing their religious duties could have been portrayed easily without all this. As for the soft talk, again Jews being rash on those they have power over, but instead cuddling to those in power in a servant like and humble tone thus making them do their evil plans is an oldie. Have you seen "Jude süss" by any chance?

"a very kind and benevolent Pilate... having to deal with a bloodthirsty Jewish rabble in complete contrast to real historical accounts"

I meant historical account about Pilate. (sorry for my poor English) Pilate was a murderous sadist by all those accounts, sadist even by Roman standards of the time. In the film he looked, at least to me, like a kind and perplexed poor guy in charge of a stinking hateful people asking philosophical questions about "truth". You didn't see that? Don't you think Gibson could have portrayed him a bit more accurate historically? Don't you wonder why he didn't?

If the "blood" sentence is OK, why did he choose to omit the subtitle? If it was so problematic, why did he insist on keeping it there? Deliberate?

I also said there were one or two Jews who weren't that bad. The scene with the Sanhedrin(?) members opposing nightly trial lasted what...5 seconds? In contrast to near two hours of hateful priests? Simon of Cyrene, bearing the cross, became a Christian saint later as tradition goes, so that doesn't really count. Christian anti-semitism was against Jews who chose to remain Jews and thus remain cursed, not the Jews who became Christians and were forgiven of their sins, as all Jesus disciples were Jews too as you said, but that is irrelevant.

In any case, 1 or 2 little shots like this can't compensate all the rest of the film.

The Devil walking among Jews. Well, Jews being devil's lot and the Devil doing his work through them is a well known part of Christian anti-semitism and went on for centuries. What do you think those scenes in the film would convey? Why are they there? Do you see the Devil walking among Roman soldiers or guards? Why only among the Jews and behind the priests? Coincidence again?

Depicting Jews in films sometimes doing bad things is not antisemitic. Depicting them, including their high priests, evil for being or remaining Jews or acting according to their beliefs is.

BTW, I didn't understand what you meant, but Jews are no "race".

hope that helps. :)

AIS

by a reader on Mon, 10/18/2004 - 22:14 | [reply](#)

Blixa,

Nevermind compare/contrast. What was wrong with the first article?

I found it persuasive.

Also, notice what this film has done: it has set people all on the Side Of Good, who I believe all strongly support Israel, to arguing about whether it is anti-semitic or not. This Jew-baiting was one of the charges in the first article.

AIS, nice posts, I agree.

-- Elliot Temple

<http://www.curi.us/>

by **Elliot Temple** on Mon, 10/18/2004 - 22:28 | [reply](#)

Non-antisemitic Passion story?

Blixa asked:

[is it] possible to tell a non-antisemitic "passion" story (by your standard), [and] how would one go about doing it?

Yes. Basically you follow the guidelines laid down by the Second Vatican Council, the rejection of which is the defining doctrine of Gibson's religion.

This question is on the [Anti-Defamation League's FAQ](#) on *The Passion* (the whole of which is worth reading – though I suppose not if you find it hateful, stupid, junk, and obscene). They say:

The story of the Passion can be told without disparaging the Jewish people. Such an account is mandated by the Catholic Church as a result of the Second Vatican Council, which in 1965 repudiated both the deicide charge and all forms of anti-Semitism in its document, *Nostra Aetate*. Most Protestant churches followed suit, and since 1965 Christians have worked cooperatively with Jews to correct anti-Semitic interpretations within Christian theology. Aside from theological considerations, artists have a moral and social responsibility to avoid promoting material that may foster hatred, bigotry and anti-Semitism.

by **David Deutsch** on Mon, 10/18/2004 - 23:27 | [reply](#)

AIS,

Before I try point-by-point, overall let me just say I think there's an inherent problem with saying that a *symbol* is inherently racist/antisemitic/whatever because symbols can be interpreted differently. A lot of what's going on here, admittedly, is that the symbols which to someone who's been more exposed to antisemitic stuff may be obvious, went over my head :-). But, if symbols go completely over the head of X% of the audience do you think X can ever reach a point where you can admit well heck maybe it's not intrinsically antisemitic after all? At what point do you start blaming

not the film but the people who see all sorts of "symbols" therein?
For example,

-You saw Satan walking "amongst the Jews" and thought that was an obvious symbol. I just saw Satan (we assume he's Satan/know this only from prior familiarity w/the story - he actually looked mostly like a Sith Lord to me ;-), who was a character in this film, therefore they had to put him somewhere. The story took place mostly in/around Jerusalem, amongst people who (mostly - we don't know actually but will assume) are Jews, so if you plopped him in a scene in this film it follows he's gonna be amongst mostly Jews. Where exactly should he have been shown observing all these events from, Korea, amongst a bunch o'Koreans? In other words if Satan Standing Near Jews *was* a "symbol" for Jews=Evil, it went completely over my head; who the heck cares who Satan is walking "amongst"? He's Satan, he's like totally evil, so I blame him not them. If I see Satan glowering over a bunch of kids at a children's playground I don't start thinking "dude those kids must be like totally evil"; if there are people who *do* interpret it that way, that's their problem IMHO.

-As for the "stereotypical Jewish look" thing, it's simply true that as a general characteristic a lot of Jews (not all), have prominent noses, is it not? (Same seems true of other nationalities from/around the Levant.) So what? And some of them are actors. (BTW I didn't really notice anything especially out-of-the-ordinary "hook-nosed" about any of the actors...you did? Which ones?) But ok, if I hire such an actor to play the role of a character who's Jewish (and heck why wouldn't I?), and (historically correctly) plopped a yarmulke on his head, you get to accuse me of using a "stereotypical Jewish look"? or I can't have that character holding money or whatever?

This is all reminding me of an old Onion piece (which I can't find) titled something like "Chinese Laundromat Owner Decried For Perpetuating Racial Stereotypes". What sort of actor should have played those roles, Jackie Chan? What sort of hat should he have worn, a foam-and-mesh that reads "Craftsman" on the front? Should we measure actors' noses and tell some of them "sorry I can't give you this part, you look JUST TOO STEREOTYPICALLY JEWISH"? I just don't know how it would be possible to make this film and survive this particular objection of yours. Apparently I'd have to (a) go out of my way to hire an actor who DOESN'T look "stereotypically Jewish", (b) dress him in clothing (Adidas sweatsuit perhaps) which doesn't in any way look like the sort of clothing a Jewish person of that time and place would have worn, and (c) make sure it's made clear he HATES MONEY. At some point can we acknowledge that it's possible to uh get a little INSANE, going too far with these objections?

-I don't know about (don't remember) the "bribed" characters you're talking about (I honestly thought the guys who were woken up in the middle of the night were simply all the other Sanhedrin members who had to get up to come to the full emergency "trial" or whatever it was; I interpreted much of what I saw as, say, "lobbying"/pressuring by the anti-Jesus faction to shore up support,

but I don't remember any of them getting "bribed"...may have happened, just don't remember). But in the case of at least Judas we have a Hebrew character who (1) presumably looked like a Hebrew and not some other nationality, and (2) according to the story, took some money. By your rules it seems I simply can't portray both (1) and (2) and survive your antisemitism charge.

In other words, it gets back to this: maybe one just can't create a film based faithfully on the passion story without being antisemitic (a consensus does seem to be forming around that point, anyway, since Matthew & John are, themselves, "antisemitic in parts").

-I agreed totally that the character of Pilate is whitewashed but we are talking about whether the film is antisemitic not whether it is historically accurate. I agree that it's (almost certainly) not historically accurate. That doesn't make it antisemitic. If Pilate had sprouted wings and flown to the moon or whipped out a Nintendo Gameboy and started playing Tetris this would have been historically inaccurate but not antisemitic. In any event despite his whitewash I still did not have a favorable impression of Pilate in this film by any means. Seriously: I sympathized completely with the Sanhedrin. (Maybe I'm just weird ;-)

-Why did Gibson omit the subtitle? To lessen the controversy, of course: so people wouldn't complain as much about it. That doesn't make the complaints valid.

-You do what amounts to some scorecard analysis of how much time is devoted to good Jews vs. how much to bad Jews. I honestly don't know (don't care much either) how the ratio comes out but IMHO at some point this becomes hair-splitting. I hope that films don't need to engage in a kind of "affirmative action" regarding how screen-time is split amongst good/bad characters. Imagine applying this rule to the Godfather films for example - a large percentage of the Italian characters are murderous gangsters or associated with same. Anti-Italian! Should all those scenes have been "balanced" by showing some nice, law abiding Italians from time to time? Perish the thought.

-Simon of Cyrene "doesn't count" because Christians like him?? Ok gimme a break. Are you going to be here saying all the positive Jewish characters (Jesus, disciples, Mary Magdalene, Simon of Cyrene, girl who wiped his face..) "don't count"? If so well then I just can't win; yes of course all the Jews in this film are portrayed negatively *if all the positive ones "don't count"*. Talk about an absurd standard however. Again it just sounds like you're saying one can't tell this story without being antisemitic.

"Do you see the Devil walking among Roman soldiers or gurads? Why only among the Jews and behind the priests? Coincidence again?"

See here's the interesting thing. *I didn't notice that*, perhaps because I wasn't looking for it. Why, were you? I'm taking your word for it that in no scenes is Satan shown "amongst" any Romans. But to be honest I'm not sure that's even true. I wasn't mentally clocking Satan's screen time or cataloguing which people

he was next to/behind. Didn't occur to me and I still don't even really see the relevance. What sort of person would? Well, in addition to you, an anti-semite would perhaps.

But I readily concede that this film could be interpreted in an antisemitic way by antisemites. Lots of things, rightly or not, are interpreted in antisemitic ways by antisemites, because antisemites are messed-up people.

"Depicting Jews in films sometimes doing bad things is not antisemitic. Depicting them, including their high priests, evil for being or remaining Jews or acting according to their beliefs is."

Interesting. But see, in the story I saw, "[they] including their high priests" were not "depicted as evil" in the first place. Like I said, I thought the priests acted understandably and rationally in the context of their society. I didn't see the general Jewish public, as presented in the film, as being or acting uniformly "evil" (some in the crowd were more bloodthirsty than others, but the same phenomenon exists on the streets of New York City :-). And I certainly didn't see any Jews who were depicted as "evil" "for being or remaining Jews".

Did you? Who? Which Jewish characters in The Passion did you find "evil"? Caiaphas? I'd disagree. And which did The Passion assert were "evil" "for being or remaining Jews"?

The one semi-exception seems to be Judas since his name is virtually treacherous by tradition, but even he is really more an object of pity than anything else. It's made clear that he was tricked, he really thought turning Jesus in was a way to keep him safe (I don't know how closely that hews to RC tradition BTW... it seems more consistent with e.g. how the Anthony Burgess "Man from Nazareth" novel presents it...). I guess the other "evil" characters are the kid-demons who chase after Judas but they're, like, not human. Did you think they were "Jews"? If so, why? :)

At some point IMHO antisemitism requires active participation on the part of the beholder. Maybe all I'm saying is I did not participate, and have a hard time understanding why anyone would.

-Re: whether Jews are a "race", I didn't "mean" anything by it, nor could I have since I don't really think "race" has a coherent definition. (Note I apparently also called "The Romans" a "race", equally wrongly I suppose, but that didn't seem to bother you. :-) Judaism is a religion, it's also a nationality, and/or a tribe (you belong to by virtue of your mother); yet not quite because people can convert, there's intermarriages and mixing, plus a while ago there was a split between what are called "Sephardic" and "Ashkenazi" Jews, some point to certain tribes in Africa as being long lost Jews, some people may descend from e.g. Spanish crypto-Jews and not even know they're Jews so what are they?... whatever. It's a culture, a nationality, with, at the same time, at least some degree of genetic commonality... so I have no idea (and don't think it matters much) what to call it but if "race" offended

you for some reason please just substitute whatever word you think

is Correct, ok? Thanks,

--Blixa

by a reader on Tue, 10/19/2004 - 00:52 | [reply](#)

DD

You explain:

The story of the Passion can be told without disparaging the Jewish people. Such an account is mandated by the Catholic Church as a result of the Second Vatican Council

Well, good. And happily, Mel Gibson's movie *The Passion of the Christ* was, indeed, such an account: It told the story of the Passion and it did not "disparage the Jewish people" to any reasonable interpreter. (I make no claims as to how unreasonable folks will interpret it.) And since you agree with the ADL that this (telling the Passion story w/o disparaging the Jewish people) is possible to do, merely noting that it's a passion play is therefore insufficient to prove the charge that it's antisemitic.

Another way to formulate such a charge would be to watch the film or otherwise learn a sufficient amount about what's in the film, and based upon this knowledge, point out the ways in which you think it disparages the Jewish people or otherwise violates the Vatican 2 proscriptions. I would be open to such arguments even if (as with those of AIS) I might find most or all of them wanting.

Alas, this option is not yet available to you....

Best,

by a reader on Tue, 10/19/2004 - 01:05 | [reply](#)

symbols

But, if symbols go completely over the head of X% of the audience do you think X can ever reach a point where you can admit well heck maybe it's not intrinsically antisemitic after all?

They don't go over the heads of latent anti-semites.

-- Elliot Temple

<http://www.curi.us/>

by **Elliot Temple** on Tue, 10/19/2004 - 01:15 | [reply](#)

I think we should basically a

I think we should basically agree to disagree on this.

I had a hard time watching this film, partly because of the bloodshed and torture and partly because continuous antisemitic scenes atleast the way I understood them maybe as you say because of having been predisposed to such things more than you.

I'm happy your experience was different and that you witnessed an elevating and rewarding rendering of the Passion.

I just add two more points as my final post in this thread:
Obviously Mel Gibson didn't include all the Biblical details about the Passion in this film.

Just as one example take the remark about "a certain young man" who was following Jesus and his captors, when they laid hold on him so casting off his cloth he ran away naked..." (Mark 14:51-52)

Yet he made sure the "blood" scene and the "bribing" scene etc. remain in the film, although they put fingers on such sensitive and painful issues, issues that have left a long history of discrimination, oppression and even massacer in their wake.

Second, there are an abundance of extra-Biblical material on Passion, yet he chose one of the sickest, most hateful and perverse hallucinations of a (quite disturbed) nun to "fill in the gaps".

To me this all passes well with all that I thought I saw while watching this particular film. That's all.

AIS

by a reader on Tue, 10/19/2004 - 01:38 | [reply](#)

Elliot

You really want me to do this? Just remember u asked 4 it.

"The poor lady in Kansas who suffered a heart attack and died as Jesus was being scourged may be the first to die from The Passion of The Christ, but I doubt she'll be the last."

Right off we start with demagoguery. People are gonna DIE from this movie! Well Elliot it was released, it's out on DVD now, you tell me, did that happen? Kindly point out links to Gibson-inspired pogroms, please. I shall peruse them if proffered.

"there's no proof for just about anything that appears in the movie, except that there was a city called Jerusalem [...]"

Stupid (and unfair) objection. Movie is explicitly based on the Bible not history texts. There's no "proof" for just about anything that happens in *The Ten Commandments* or *Clash of the Titans* either. But "proof" is the standard a Passion story, as opposed to those others, must meet because why? There's no "proof" that JC as such actually existed, let alone that he was the "son of God" (obviously), so, what, Christians can't make movies premised on those things?

"The Christian faithful believe the Gospels, but everyone knows that they were written a generation after the events they are supposed to describe."

What's that "but" doing there? The Christian faithful believe the Gospels, AND everyone knows that they (in the forms we know them) were written later. So what? He's dangerously beginning to

sound like he's constructing an argument that the Christian faithful need to reject their books, on some level, to make him happy.

"At worst, they had their own motives to make the Jews look bad, not least of which was that the Jews were not buying in to their message that Jesus was messiah, and the gentiles -- Romans, Greeks and other foreigners -- were not relishing the idea of being circumcised."

Ok so here's speculation about the motives of "Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John". Nice simplistic analysis too, apparently this guy's sure that there were four guys with these 4 names. Ignorant of all that "Q" type scholarship about how the Gospels *really* evolved, of course.

"The solution was to make it easy for the Gentiles to accept Jesus without accepting the Torah"

Well of course. This notion was very important to early Christianity. He's criticizing an aspect of Christianity which was at its core, that you can be "saved" (or whatever) without not eating shellfish (and so on). He's saying it's like not ok for Christianity to have developed that concept because this is mean to Jews. Well clearly Christianity is inimical to Judaism (in that it's *not* Judaism but uses some Jewish books and notions) but stated that way it doesn't seem like such a valid complaint now does it?

"just believe that he died for your sins and you will be saved, while everyone else will go to Hell."

Heh. "everyone else"? Nice straw-man cartoon of what Christians believe. Who's the one employing stereotypes?

"I have no objection to those who believe in every word as the Gospel Truth."

Course not. Ok so I can ignore the preceding coupla paragraphs.

"But Mel Gibson set out to kill this Jesus. [...]"

Now we get a bunch of stuff which is basically saying "I don't think it's ok for Mel to have set out to make this movie". Ok sorry but what? Yes we can all recognize that Mel's belief has a curiously hyper-Catholic fixation on the suffering and the pain and the flaying and the whatnot. That's his deal, that's the movie he wanted to make, and he did. Not ok, I guess?

"What is important, it seems, is "who done it." And here Gibson stacks the decks and makes it clear as day that the Jewish priests pushed and manipulated and howled for Jesus to be killed and tortured."

So what? First of all is that not what the source material states? David Deutsch just explained to me that the ADL says it's perfectly possible to make a story from said source material about said events and not be antisemitic. Who cares if "the Jewish priests" (=a majority of the Sanhedrin) pushed for his execution? 1) On the face of it, they were correct to do so as a matter of religious law. 2)

Even if you think they weren't - even if you think this makes those Jewish priests monsters or look like monsters (I don't) - this is a slander against *the Jewish people* HOW, exactly? Only if you're stupid enough to see it that way, to equate "those Jewish priests" with "all Jews". Who is? Show of hands please?

"Gibson's public statements that all mankind sinned, and that Jesus took all those sins upon himself, and that this is a movie about love and forgiveness, or that he is just telling the truth -- well, that may sound good to Diane Sawyer, but it doesn't wash"

=I have read Gibson's mind and he's lying about the stuff he believes. He says he believes X but I know better!

"And yes, if it was foreordained that Jesus should die, then everyone was just playing their part in this passion play and no one should be blamed. That may operate for those of deep faith, but that is not the director's intention."

More wonderful mind-reading. Does this guy do parties?

"No, this is a movie about bloody premeditated murder"

Wrong, it's a movie about an execution. The bloodiness and the gore of that execution can be chalked up to the fact that the ruling power in that place and time (NOT Jews) had an especially barbaric way of executing people. If there was something unlawful about the execution so as to make it murder this can be blamed on the Roman who ordered it.

"a murder of Christ by the Jews."

Funny in the movie I saw a bunch of Roman brutes did the deed.

"As The Lovingway United Pentecostal Church in Denver so lovingly put it, on opening night, in a sign it posted opposite the local movie theater: "Jews Killed the Lord Jesus.""

Wow. If he can point to some extremists that totally proves something!

"and now a Roman Catholic rich boy says,"

FYI Elliot (and David, who seems to have been offended by this fact), this is the part where I stopped reading this wonderful, marvelous, informative article earlier. Do you really blame me? "Roman Catholic rich boy"? We are veering into immature name-calling territory here. (Now I may do that at times, but I don't get published on Israel Insider ;-)

"says.. that it was the Jews who did it, after all."

Sigh. Watch the movie: he does not. The Romans did it, the council of Jewish priests asked them to because Jesus had blasphemed. This is how the frickin story goes! You can't tell this story if it doesn't go like that. Bottom line here with these objections is "you just can't tell this story".

"The Satanic Jews,"

!!! Is this guy trying to win a straw-man record or what.

"Christian critics wondered why the resurrection scene was so short, why the redemptive power of Jesus was hardly touched upon."

I didn't "wonder" at all, I knew the answer, because Gibson's particular sect/faith is particularly obsessed by the passion as opposed to the resurrection. Although that emphasis may ring hollow/unsatisfying to Protestants, etc, (incl. myself) that's still allowed, isn't it? What I'm hearing here: "no, it's not! not allowed!" This article-writer is telling Gibson what sort of faith he's allowed to adhere to. I don't presume to do so.

"We're not talking about the twenty million bucks...[etc]"

Weird recital of how much money the movie made. What does this have to do with whether it's antisemitic?

"this movie is designed from day one to advance the theology of the cultish sect of retro-Catholics to which Mel and his wacked-out, hated-consumed mother and father belong"

1) From what I've heard, that's basically true, Mel makes no secret that he made the film to advance his religion. Not ok? 2) Dunno anything about Mel's mother, I'm sure the "wacked-out" charge is correct when it comes to his father, but nevertheless this kind of name-calling and guilt-by-association would be beneath a better, more responsible writer who wasn't writing a stupid, hate-filled article. Alas....

"anti-Popes, his dad calls them"

More crap about his dad, relevant why?

"This is his attempt at payback for those Hollywood Jews who resisted his idea, and the anti-Christian (i.e., Jew-dominated) Media."

Wow this writer's really riffing now. He's spun a whole theory about Mel's private thoughts and everything. I was supposed to continue reading because this is all so brilliant, right David?

[more about imagined-Gibson's take on "Hollywood Jews", Gibson's father, etc... getting bored]

"Gibson left it in but "generously" didn't add a subtitle. He didn't need to: he ensured there was so much press coverage, attracting attention not only to the line but to the Jewish efforts to remove it, that he fixated viewers on finding the Aramaic curse and on Jewish "censorship" of that "truth." "

He's claiming that Gibson "fixated" viewers on finding the Aramaic curse. Interestingly he produces no such viewers who were so "fixated". He imagines that they were. That is what I call junk. Maybe *he* was fixated on it. That is what I call projection. Frankly when I saw the film I forgot to look for Caiaphas saying those lines.

Probably my fixation was so subconscious that I looked for it

subconsciously

[mind reading bla bla]

"Mel tries to portray himself as the poor victim of the Jews"

where? how?

"The truth is that Mel's technique -- inducing trauma and fixation to that trauma by the use of violence -- is a famous method acted out not only in his previous bloody films"

Can't resist dig against other Mel Gibson films. No relevance, just couldn't resist. This is more stupidity.

"so that one can proudly say that "Jews killed Lord Jesus" and feel exalted."

Who said that? (Yes I know some church the author pointed to. Who else?)

"Mel has whipped all this anger and left the audience with "nowhere to go.""

As a result, they promptly went out and committed a bunch of pogroms, right?

You know, if I took articles like this more seriously I might actually be offended at the vile slander against Americans and American society, that we're all JUST SO ITCHIN' to pogromize a bunch o'Jews that all it takes is a Mel Gibson movie. Thanks for the confidence, dude. Nice to know I'm a hair-trigger away from being a Nazi in your eyes.

"It's a straight line from the Damascus Road to the Damascus Blood Libel, to the Dachau Camp to Denver's Lovingway Church and Cineplex."

The alliteration here is perhaps the least dumb thing in the article. Of course associating Dachau Camp (murder count: N) to Denver's Lovingway Church and Cineplex (murder count: 0) is not anything like what one would call *proportion* but hey, it's clever (both start with D, get it?)

[more Mel's-his-father's-son guilt by association (dare I say "blood-guilt"?)...]

"let them realize too that the Gospels, of Mark and of Mel, try to obscure that Jesus was a Jew killed by Gentiles."

Yeah I'm such a maroon I didn't even know that Jesus guy was a Jew. Goll-ee I thought he was from Texas, thanks for setting me straight.

"The story-tellers, ancient and modern, blame the Jews so they can feel some relief for betraying and distorting the faith to which their presumed Savior belonged."

CMIIW but he's charging here that Christians are "betraying" and

"distorting" Judaism. Christianity, apparently, is just not a very valid religion to belong to.

"Christians should say not "everyone sinned against Christ, and I am a sinner too""

Presumes to tell Christians what they 'should' say. He's anointed himself Pope/minister now, essentially. His authority on matters Christian must not be questioned.

"Besides, the good Christian is tempted to say, "I accept killing God, and therefore am saved, whereas the Jews do not, and therefore are damned.""

He is? Wow good to know. I never knew these things about myself till this expert on my thoughts informed me of them.

"Rather they should consider: "Christians have historically turned against the people of Jesus, the people of his God, have killed them cruelly in every generation, and I must struggle within my soul never to do so too and to confront with courage those who do.""

Well of course Christians should say that, as should everyone else. Don't be a stupid frickin antisemite. I'm on board with that and I'm all in favor of confronting with courage those who kill Jews cruelly.

Notice that Mel Gibson ain't such a person, and to focus on him, when there are, like, REAL antisemite killers REALLY KILLING JEWS, is wacky at best.

"But that, needless to say, is not Mel Gibson's intent."

Heh. Ok if you say so. This mind-reading stuff is awesome!

"The Passion of the Christ, amplifying and embellishing the inherent anti-Jewishness of the Gospels, is a real-life Lethal Weapon 5, already at a theater near you, and aimed straight at the nearest Jew."

If so then it was a total dud, wasn't it? Missed the nearest Jew and the second-nearest Jew and the Nth nearest Jew and, well, frankly failed to hit any of 'em at all. The only casualty I know of in fact is some lady in Kansas who had a heart attack mentioned at the beginning of the article, and she may not have even been a Jew (blast - Mel must've been disappointed!).

If Gibson really had wanted to kill a bunch of Jews, making this movie was like the worst way he could've chosen to do it.

"Daddy must be proud."

At some point can we agree that this daddy stuff is a low blow? Really now.

I feel dirty from having read through that whole thing. Thanks Elliot

by a reader on Tue, 10/19/2004 - 02:14 | [reply](#)

AI,

Yes we agree to disagree :-)

"I'm happy your experience was different and that you witnessed an elevating and rewarding rendering of the Passion."

Heh... WHOA there I never said that! I did not find it particularly elevating nor rewarding. I liked it ok but not great. I think the best thing I can say about the film is that it was technically well-produced. best,

--Blixa

by a reader on Tue, 10/19/2004 - 02:16 | [reply](#)

wow u write a lot blixa

I feel dirty from having read through that whole thing. Thanks Elliot

gulp. don't blame me! I agree with David that you shouldn't read things you don't enjoy. I really only meant for you to answer my question from memory in a few sentences, unless you wanted to do otherwise.

-- Elliot Temple

<http://www.curi.us/>

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Tue, 10/19/2004 - 05:20 | [reply](#)

Heh yeah sorry there, sane now

No worries Elliot, sorry for overreaction. On the bright side, I had some spare time to kill yesterday (as you can see) & you helped ;-)

"[symbols] They don't go over the heads of latent anti-semites."

Nothin' much goes over the heads of latent anti-semites does it? Anything you say or do or point to (that penny on the ground.. that comedian on TV) can stand as proof that Jews are evil to latent anti-semites. This is cuz latent (and non latent) anti-semites are messed-up pathetic people whose thinking is on the fritz. My hope here is that we don't convince ourselves that movies et al must pass the standard "can't possibly be interpreted so as to hate Jews by any antisemite" in order not to be considered antisemitic itself, as a movie. That would be a difficult test. Best,

by a reader on Tue, 10/19/2004 - 17:43 | [reply](#)

Confused

I can't make head or tail of most of this.

First of all, is there a difference between material that *may* induce hatred, and material that is actually objectively *anti-Semitic*? Surely a lot of *good* material induces hatred?

Secondly, I haven't seen a single convincing argument that this film

contains anything that is demonstrably anti-Semitic as opposed to criticising *specific Jews*. And what is more, I cannot see how, in a work of drama, such a thing is even *possible*. Is there a voiceover saying "Like all Jews, this guy did X terrible thing," or something? Are characters portrayed in ways that are patently *unrealistic and false* and which convey mythical anti-Semitic libels?

Surely one does not have to avoid criticising all Jews in order not to be accused of anti-Semitism?

I think to compare this film with Michael Moore's piece of trash is really obscene. There are degrees of evil, and not being able to distinguish the ground between them is a serious moral error that undermines our attempts to spread good ideas. Moore is full of virulent hatred, and he tells lies to further his cause. Where are the deliberate falsehoods in Gibson's film? Where is there objectively extreme hatred towards the whole of the Jewish people?

I haven't seen "The Passion", but I can see no possible way that any depiction of this story can be interpreted as definitely and objectively attacking Jews as a whole, as opposed to attacking the actions of certain Jews at the time of those events. There are historical reasons why the Jewish authorities at the time would have a) not been the best of Jews, and b) not been very positive about Jesus.

The last thing we need is political correctness on the right side of the fence as well!

And if anyone thinks this comment means that *I* must be anti-Semitic, I'm just going to crawl off into a hole and die.

by a reader on Tue, 10/19/2004 - 17:55 | [reply](#)

Moral Equivalence

I agree with the readers who are upset by the suggestion that there is a moral equivalence between Moore and Gibson. I agree that Moore's actions are much worse. Moore is knowingly lying to further a bad agenda, and Gibson is probably telling a story that he believes to be true and important, although I think he's wrong and doing something dangerous.

But, **The World** didn't claim that they are morally equivalent. The post said:

The two movies are somewhat similar symptoms of the same serious malaise in Western society: the widespread loss of confidence in its secular moral values. Both are personal statements made by charming rogues who have a sense of humour, are very good at their jobs, and are driven by a core of gibbering hatred. Both peddle incendiary falsehoods that have caused murder and destruction beyond measure, been a blight on every kind

of progress and will undoubtedly do a great deal more

harm before they are extirpated.

I suppose the line about hatred could be reaching. Maybe David is more familiar with Gibson's motivations than I am, but I'm willing to concede that he might not be motivated by hatred, but is stupidly repeating likely falsehoods that have a history of fostering hatred.

Either way, I think both films do intentionally appeal to bad elements of popular culture, and they should be criticized for it.

Gil

by **Gil** on Tue, 10/19/2004 - 22:18 | [reply](#)

"secular moral values"

I don't think there's any such thing as "secular moral values". They all originate in religious philosophy. Or maybe someone can tell me the difference between religious moral values and secular moral values (secular ones happen to be adopted by people who don't believe in God is not a good enough answer).

I do think the values of some religions are more sensible than the values of others.

The malaise in the West is loss of confidence in *moral* values, not "secular" moral values, whatever they are (who invented them? where are they written down? how we do know they're *essentially* different than religious ones?)

Alice

by a reader on Wed, 10/20/2004 - 02:38 | [reply](#)

re: "secular moral values"

my values are secular moral values, aren't they?

-- Elliot Temple

<http://www.curi.us/>

by **Elliot Temple** on Wed, 10/20/2004 - 03:19 | [reply](#)

re: Secular Moral Values

Alice doubts the existence of "secular moral values" and then admits:

I do think the values of some religions are more sensible than the values of others.

What does that mean? Does reasonableness matter? Does it help us to determine what's right? Don't we have to appeal to some mystical commandments to know what's right? If you don't think so, then you believe in "secular moral values".

If your claim is merely that religion has played an important

historical role in the development of moral philosophy, then you're right. If you claim that religion is necessary (or even reliably helpful) to pursue morality, then I think you're wrong.

Religions are powerful mechanisms for developing and transmitting moral ideas (some good, and some bad). But, I think that there are better ways to pursue the truth.

Gil

by **Gil** on Wed, 10/20/2004 - 04:01 | [reply](#)

passion and anti-semitism

The critics of the Passion in here are saying that because the movie had old men in headresses (who looked middle-eastern not "hooknosed") that is was degrading to the Jewish community? Are you critics denying that old men (Pharisees and Sadducees sp?) wore robes, headresses, and were extremely severe in punishing any dissenters in the ancient Jewish community? Are you denying that a crowd of people in Jerusalem 2,000 years ago would not have been mostly made up of Jewish people?

If you are denying these facts of history, then I would suggest that you reference your own website here, you sound like you may fit in with an "anti-semitic conspiracy theory" crowd -- refusing to accept that the Jewish people of 2,000 years ago DID wear headresses and robes, and DID have religious rulers that ruled Mosaic Law (common law as well) and were NOT flexible in their decisions, as demonstrated in the ancient writings of Josephus where all sorts of atrocities are documented - ALONG WITH THE STORY OF CHRIST'S PASSION. Josephus was a JEWISH scribe, well accepted by even the most athiestic scholars as a viable source of biblical historical facts.

A little personal info. I have been to Israel twice before, my wife is a Jewish convert to Christianity. I am not anti-semitic, and I love all my Jewish brothers and sisters. I implore that you must stop calling everyone Anti-semitic- who thinks that during the passover festival 2,000 years ago, in Jerusalem, that a crowd of mostly Jewish people argued for our Christ's death. Also, all the bloody violence, in the movie, and in the new testament of the Bible, state that the ROMANS with "pointy noses" were the ones who did all the torture, passed the death sentence, and performed the execution.

You seem to be logical people, I must ask, are you trying to tell me that 2,000 years ago, during passover, in Jerusalem, that it was not 90-95% Jewish population in the city? Logically, if 90% of the population is Jewish, and it is passover festival, one could safely deduce that the "crowd" of people in front of the Roman palace was made up mostly of either Jewish followers of Jesus, regular Jewish people of faith, and secular Romans (maybe a few easterners and africans as well) .

All this being said, I think that actual Jewish folks in here and

elsewhere, who are claiming "anti-semitism" from the Passion story, they FEEL like CHRISTIANS somehow think that they are SOLELY responsible for Christs death, which you are obviously not... I put forth that you are insecure in your Jewishness (if you're jewish), or plain anti-passion story in general. These people claim anti-semitism when anyone dares to suggest that the Messiah was indeed condemned to death due to false witness before the Religious leaders in charge at the time. Jewish people can not possibly be held accountable, when it was a mob type crowd, during passover festival 2,000 years ago in Jerusalem.

All peoples are responsible for putting the Messiah to death (which really was part of God's plan anyway, so how could we blame the Jewish people?)

by a reader on Thu, 10/21/2004 - 05:20 | [reply](#)

Jesus would have been brown

As for the "stereotypical Jewish look" thing, it's simply true that as a general characteristic a lot of Jews (not all), have prominent noses, is it not? (Same seems true of other nationalities from/around the Levant.) So what? And some of them are actors. (BTW I didn't really notice anything especially out-of-the-ordinary "hook-nosed" about any of the actors...you did? Which ones?) But ok, if I hire such an actor to play the role of a character who's Jewish (and heck why wouldn't I?), and (historically correctly) plop a yarmulke on his head, you get to accuse me of using a "stereotypical Jewish look"? or I can't have that character holding money or whatever?

But the stereo-type you are depicting here is of a white anglo-saxon Jew. Is this really how a Jew living in the middle East 2000 years ago would have looked? Don't you think he or she would have had a more distinctly middle Eastern appearance? That he or she would have been more brown than white? That his or her hair would have been more dark than light? If the film was being accurate, then surely Jesus should have been brown and those Jews persecuting him brown also? The white people would have been the Romans. So, then, why did Gibson - who despite his pretences to accuracy in other aspects of the film - choose to depict Jews of the Middle East from 2000 years ago according to the white anglo-saxon stereotype?

by a reader on Thu, 10/21/2004 - 08:26 | [reply](#)

that was to me, guess I gotta answer

Someone writes to me:

"But the stereo-type you are depicting here is of a white anglo-saxon Jew."

Wait, what? The stereotype *I* am depicting? I didn't make the

movie. Nor am I the one who is calling any of "The Passion"'s actors a "stereotype" in the first place. (Come now, isn't this on some level demeaning - to those actors? I reject this whole nonsense equation where actors=stereotype. They're *people*, ok! They look how they look. Hiring actor XYZ to play character ABC is 'perpetuating a stereotype'? That's almost an offensive concept in itself.)

I did say that what another commenter (not me BTW) called a "hooknose", and portrayed as offensive (to have "hooknosed" actors in a movie about Jews, I guess(?)), was, in reality, simply a physical characteristic often found in people who are Jewish. (And *not* Jewish IMHO, but that's another story, and this is all so boring that I don't really care.)

But anyway, are you, or anyone else disputing that? Let me know.

If all the actors in the film had the nose of Nicole Kidman (just to name someone off the top of my head who seems to have a skinny, delicate, almost nonexistent nose to my eye) would that make the complaint go away? Is that, therefore, what filmmakers should do - ONLY use actors with a Kidman type nose to play Jews? (Careful how you answer that.)

"Is this really how a Jew living in the middle East 2000 years ago would have looked?"

Heck if I know. Photography didn't exist back then. You're saying No? How do you know? Are *you* subscribing to stereotypes?

Anyway what you're saying now is that the filmmakers should have labored more thoroughly to hire ONLY actors who looked "more Middle Eastern Jewish", whatever you think that means. (And it's really not clear where your notion of what looks and doesn't look "Middle Eastern Jewish 2000 years ago" comes from.) But hey, perhaps so. I wasn't bothered by it but evidently you *were* bothered by how some of the actors... looked. (?)

"That he or she would have been more brown than white?"

Again, I have no idea whether people in that place and time would have looked "more brown than white", beyond some vague notion that they would have appeared "semitic", and this notion was not violated in the film. Anyway, I didn't take spectrographic type measurements of the skin colors of any of the actors. Depending on what metric you have in mind, maybe the actors' skins *were* more brown than white? You disagree? Tell me which actors you think had skin which was "too white".

"That his or her hair would have been more dark than light?"

Um, to my eyes virtually everyone in the film had dark hair. Let's just cut to the chase shall we: Which actors do you think should have been kicked off the project for not being dark enough for your taste? Hristo Jivkov who played John? Francesco de Vito (Peter)? Mattia Sbragia (Caiaphas)? Who? ([reference](#))

"If the film was being accurate, then surely Jesus should have been

brown"

Again I don't know how you know these things, but anyway the guy seemed brown to me. I look at [this photo](#) and it seems pretty brown. Not brown enough? What color was "Jesus Christ" in your opinion? And where did that opinion come from?

Maybe it's just me but "Jim Caviezel's not brown enough!" as an argument for antisemitism just tickles my funny bone. I'm so glad there are people who bravely boldly stand up...against (?) racism/bigotry by... complaining about the skin hues of actors.

"If the film was being accurate, then surely Jesus should have been brown and those Jews persecuting him brown also?"

There **were no** Jews persecuting him that I saw in this story. There was a council of priests which convicted him of blasphemy but did not carry out the punishment. There were Jews yelling at him from crowds etc, is that "persecuting"? Anyway they looked 'brown' AFAIK (if you disagree tell me which ones you think weren't brown enough). The people actually **persecuting** him however were Romans. Granted some of them perhaps should have "looked brown" because as I understand it historically (I could be wrong), many of the "Roman" soldiers would in fact have been Syrians in Roman employ. But hey.

"So, then, why did Gibson - who despite his pretences to accuracy in other aspects of the film - choose to depict Jews of the Middle East from 2000 years ago according to the white anglo-saxon stereotype?"

I don't know what you mean. What is the "white anglo-saxon stereotype"? Are you saying those characters meant to be Jews looked instead like white anglo-saxons? But they did not (not to me), not that I'm at all sure what a "white anglo-saxon" is in the first place, of course. Anyway this is an odd complaint compared with that other person's complaint that everyone was too "hooknosed". Which is it? It seems like you're complaining both that they looked "too Jewish" and yet not Jewish enough. Granted if these actors' names are any indication, they seem to have been mostly a bunch of Italians.

The fact that the outdoor scenes of the film were filmed primarily in Italy may go a long way towards explaining that. (Yes, when there's a perfectly logical **practical** explanation for these circumstances you're complaining about, it's better to go with the "antisemitism" charge. That's not conspiracy thinking at all, is it, [The World?](#))

Question: Do you actually have any good reason to believe that the actors in that film, in aggregate, looked markedly different than a snapshot of that society would have looked 2000 years ago? (Answer: No you most certainly do not.)

Maybe we need to set up some guidelines about what facial characteristics an actor must have to play a Jew in a film and not be a "stereotype". It seems to be a tricky thing, you straddle a thin line; you **have** to look like a Jew but you **can't** have what

anyone can characterize as a "hooknose".. you *have* to be "Brown" (if playing a Jew in the Middle East) but on the other hand be sure you're not "swarthy" because then people will complain about that too. (See [this](#), complains about "Swarthy Middle Eastern Stereotype".) And so on.

I've no doubt whatsoever that if Mel Gibson had filmed the entire project in Israel and hired all Israeli-Jewish extras (actually: for true "authenticity" he'd have had to be more careful than that, to take painstaking care not to hire any e.g. recent Russian immigrants there, perhaps even eschewing those from Europe in the past 50 years, and use *only* those Israeli Jews with sufficient Middle Eastern bona fides), people would still have whined about him "using stereotypes". Actually they would have whined even more because their complaints would have been even *more* valid. Just look at those crowd scenes: They're ALL so "stereotyped"! Too "hooknosed"! Too "swarthy"! Elliot made the point a while back that a bad result of the Gibson film is that it has led to people, all on the good side, bickering about whether it's "antisemitic". This is undoubtedly true and undoubtedly regrettable but it would not have been the case, conceivably, if the complainers (some of which are in evidence here) would not have lodged such frivolous, overreaching, in some cases downright childish complaints in the first place.

Anyway, back to this burning issue of how actors look, I now idly wonder if anybody has ever undertaken the project of defining *authentic* Jewish facial characteristics, complete with measurements and definitions of features, strict categories, etc. I'll go look up whether there's ever been any organized, meticulous research - research done with, one might say, a Bavarian's eye for detail - in this area. If so, adhering to such guidelines when hiring actors who play Jews seems to be the only way to really be sure not to be antisemitic. ;-P

--Blix

by a reader on Thu, 10/21/2004 - 15:23 | [reply](#)

Q 4 Blix

Do you see our criticism of the movie as parallel to the many variations of minority criticisms of racism, many of which indeed are oversensitive, or a different sort of thing?

-- Elliot Temple
<http://www.curi.us/>

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Thu, 10/21/2004 - 19:15 | [reply](#)

both I think

Elliot,

I think it's only fair of me to acknowledge a distinction between what are probably *two* main antisemitism arguments being made against Passion, here:

1. The story's content, primarily the "blood" curse, which (if taken literally and as historically has been done) implies a slanderous, dangerous idea about Jews which has caused much damage

2. Litany of various aesthetic features and details of the movie such as racial makeup of actors, editorial choices, casting choices, staging, etc. which are all thought or argued to reinforce symbolically the antisemitic content, or betray some feeling Mel Gibson is thought to have

The World's original complaint, I'd guess, was centered mostly on 1; for 1, whether any complaints #2 are valid is really neither here nor there. Meanwhile, a few other commenters have chimed in to agree with **The World**, but dissing the movie based on things which basically fall into category 2. Category 2, I do see as quite parallel to the usual racial griping, yes. Category 1, I recognize to be a far different, unique animal.

I'm not trying to imply that the two categories are totally independent of course. Like I said, 2 (if/when it is there) reinforces 1 (if/when it is interpreted in the slanderous way). My point here I think has been to try to argue that few in the West interpret 1 in the slanderous way anymore, and most of the complaints in 2 are frivolous.

Does this answer your question (not sure :),

--Blix

by a reader on Thu, 10/21/2004 - 22:40 | [reply](#)

re: both i think

My point here I think has been to try to argue that few in the West interpret 1 in the slanderous way anymore

I'm not so sure. If the anti-Israel media is any guide...

-- Elliot Temple

<http://www.curi.us/>

by **Elliot Temple** on Thu, 10/21/2004 - 23:00 | [reply](#)

semi touche

But,

the anti-Israel media

...does not believe in anything from "the Bible" in the first place. The "blood libel" is on the face of it meaningless if there's no real reason to care just who killed that dude anyway.

Although the point that the anti-Israel media, and other flavors of neo-antisemites, could subconsciously be operating from believing in some secular parallel residual version of the blood libel, is well taken. ;-) But their anti-Jewish efforts are not really aided/abetted

by the telling of a pop-culture passion play. As we saw, the major media was quite hostile to Gibson's movie and only too happy to raise the antisemitism flag on this one.

It's an easy way to cover their ass for all that crap they write about Israel.

Like I said, complaining about a Mel Gibson movie when there's, like, REAL Jew-killing going on is wacky at best.

--Blix

by a reader on Thu, 10/21/2004 - 23:35 | [reply](#)

Re: "secular moral values"

I think that there is a useful distinction to be made between moral values whose justification depends on supernatural sources and those that do not - even though there is some overlap between the two, and even though historically they affected each other's evolution to some extent. For instance, the idea that a single-celled organism is entitled to protection as a human being is defended only by people who believe (whether they use this terminology or not) that such organisms have supernatural human souls, and that morality is different for souled and non-souled entities. These are purely religious values.

At the other end of the scale, the idea that freedom of religion, freedom of speech and of the press, limited government, presumption of innocence and so on, should be overriding regulatory principles when human beings organise themselves in groups, is not present, even in rudimentary form, in any evolved religious tradition. These are purely secular values. They were invented partly by anonymous thinkers over the millennia, each of whom contributed an idea here and there to traditions like the English Common Law and its predecessors, and partly by philosophers such as Locke, Hume and Mill.

In the large overlap- and co-evolved regions there are things like equality before the law, the objectivity and universality of morality itself, and the intrinsic value of human beings and of human life and well-being (though the moral value of human knowledge and human creativity belongs entirely to the secular category).

by [David Deutsch](#) on Wed, 10/27/2004 - 03:49 | [reply](#)

Re: "secular moral values"

David Deutsch posts a series of assertions, none well argued or particularly connected to anything. I would welcome better defense of the first set of assertions. To wit: Can we have an example by direct testimony from the man's own mouth of "gibbering hatred" from Mel Gibson? Can Deutsch enumerate the criteria by which he supposes Gibson and Michael Moore to be equivalent menaces? Would it be too much to ask for Deutsch to explain why his original post is not a manifestation of the epidemic anti-Hellenism that is

Islamism's best ally?

Just as a side note, and not to frustrate Deutsch in the public practice of what is clearly a matter of religion to him, but thoughtful athiests oppose abortion not because of the baby's humanity but because of their own.

presenceofmind.net

by **gswann** on Wed, 10/27/2004 - 14:06 | [reply](#)

not "well argued"

David's post is a conjecture. It is bold (that's good). It says a lot about the world (that's good). It is meant for a certain problem situation (one aspect of this: the post has nothing much to do with the Gibson stuff, directly). It is not supposed to have positive arguments for it, because such things don't work epistemically. It is not supposed to preemptively head off all the bad rival theories possible, because doing so would be boring.

So, you say it's not "well argued" but that is to miss the point. Which part do you have a criticism of, and what rival theory do you prefer?

I do not understand the question about Hellenism (Greeks, right?).

-- Elliot Temple

<http://www.curi.us/>

by **Elliot Temple** on Wed, 10/27/2004 - 15:07 | [reply](#)

A rival theory:

People have "lost faith" in secular arguments because secular movements murdered at least 160 million innocents in the last century. I do not uphold this theory--I would not even frame the debate as secular v. ecclesiastical (or whatever it is Duetsch (mis-)aims to scourge)--but this is certainly a better theory than the one he propped and has not defended.

Hellenism = Occidentalism = Westernism = the vanishing transnational culture of pluralistic bourgeois capitalism. I'm betting you could have worked this out on your own.

Greg Swann, **presenceofmind.net**

by **gswann** on Wed, 10/27/2004 - 16:08 | [reply](#)

Evidence of Mel Gibson's Motivation In His Own Words

I guess you can all use Google at least as well as I can, but there's a quotation [here](#) and some more [here](#).

by **David Deutsch** on Wed, 10/27/2004 - 16:32 | [reply](#)

I know I've "lost faith" in

I know I've "lost faith" in secular murderers. Time to put murder back in the hands of those who really know what they're doing: religious fanatics. Don't worry. Already happening.

by a reader on Wed, 10/27/2004 - 16:48 | [reply](#)

google

how and when to use google is not manifest, nor even easy.

-- Elliot Temple

<http://www.curi.us/>

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Wed, 10/27/2004 - 17:37 | [reply](#)

f*** yeah

Anyway, I finally got to see "Team America" this weekend, and I think one thing we can all agree on, it's HILARIOUS. :-)

--Blix

by a reader on Wed, 10/27/2004 - 19:00 | [reply](#)

Who hates whom?

So we have this:

"I have friends and parents of friends who have numbers on their arms. The guy who taught me Spanish was a Holocaust survivor. He worked in a concentration camp in France. Yes, of course. Atrocities happened. War is horrible. The Second World War killed tens of millions of people. Some of them were Jews in concentration camps. Many people lost their lives. In the Ukraine, several million starved to death between 1932 and 1933. During the last century, 20 million people died in the Soviet Union."

And this:

"Why are they calling her a Nazi? Because modern secular Judaism wants to blame the Holocaust on the Catholic Church. And it's revisionism. And they've been working on that one for a while."

This is your evidence of "gibbering hatred" and your justification for smearing a great libertarian artist with a vile propagandist of tyranny. I think we have discovered where the "gibbering hatred" resides.

Greg Swann, presenceofmind.net

by [gswann](#) on Wed, 10/27/2004 - 22:47 | [reply](#)

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