

# HANDY GUIDE TO MEL'S CRITICS

*By the time the March edition of Catalyst arrives in your home, "The Passion of the Christ" will have opened in theaters nationwide; it opens February 25. Be sure to keep this handy guide nearby so you can monitor what the critics will be saying. Here is a list of some of the most irresponsible remarks made by Mel's critics, all of whom blasted the movie without seeing it.*

**Alex Beam, *Boston Globe*:**

"Whatever Gibson's intentions, the film will be perceived as anti-Semitic, because the Christian Bible holds that Jesus was a Jewish prophet rejected and betrayed by his own people."  
(7/22/03)

**Sr. Mary C. Boys, Professor of Practical Theology, Union Theological Seminary:**

"I don't believe that [given the divisive] result that he [Mel Gibson] could claim that the Holy Spirit is behind this. ... Our concern is what happens after people see the film? Will anti-Semitic actions happen or will attitudes against the Jews be exacerbated by this film?" (Cybercast News Service, 11/7/03)

"For too many years, Christians have accused Jews of being Christ-killers and used that charge to rationalize violence... This is our fear." (Associated Press, 8/9/03)

"As a member of the Catholic Church, I regard [Mel Gibson's] thinking as bizarre and dangerous, and suggest that Jews judge them similarly." (*The Jewish Week*, 3/28/03)

**Harold Brackman, Consultant, Simon Wiesenthal Center:**

"It is Christians who bear the responsibility, after 2,000 years of religious-inspired anti-Semitism, to inhibit rather than inflame the excesses of their own haters. When filmmakers with a Christological agenda fail to accept this responsibility, the blood that may result is indeed on their

hands." (*Forward*, 8/8/03)

**James Carroll, *Boston Globe*:**

"Even a faithful repetition of the Gospel stories of the death of Jesus can do damage exactly because those sacred texts themselves carry the virus of Jew hatred. ... The religious anti-Judaism of the Gospels provided soil out of which grew the racial anti-Semitism of the Holocaust. Once Christians know where the falsely anti-Jewish Passion story led, it is criminal for them to repeat it naively—whether from a pulpit or on a movie screen." (4/15/03)

**Richard Chesnoff, *Daily News* (NY):**

"We've come a long way in Christian-Jewish relations. But now Hollywood's Mel Gibson threatens to set it all back—maybe 2,000 years." (8/8/03)

**Michael J. Cook, Professor of Judaeo-Christian Studies, Hebrew Union College:**

"Gibson's film may reverse progress the Christian community has made in reinterpreting anti-Jewish New Testament passages." (*The Jewish Week* [NY], 3/28/03)

**Eric Fetschmann, *New York Post*:**

"Gibson's insistence that the film 'conforms to the narratives of Christ's passion and death found in the four Gospels of the New Testament' is hardly reassuring. Because, to be sure, the gospels, for various historical reasons, do paint Jews in the worst light." (6/19/03)

**Abraham Foxman, National Director, Anti-Defamation League:**

"[Mel Gibson] entertains views that can only be described as anti-Semitic." (Associated Press, 9/19/03)

"[Cardinal Dario Castrillon Hoyos's praise] makes the film worse, more damaging, more threatening because what we thought we had eliminated with Vatican II is coming back in a film." (*Daily Variety*, 9/19/03)

"Can you imagine, if this film is not changed and it begins to play around the world, what—what it may possibly trigger?" (Minnesota Public Radio, "Marketplace," 9/9/03)

If Gibson's "message was tainted, [the movie] is dangerous. He is an icon. People will see this film without a guide, without their priest." (*Philadelphia Inquirer*, 8/13/03)

**Paula Fredriksen, Professor of the Appreciation of Scripture, Boston University:**

"A movie like this could very possibly elicit violence against Jews." (Cybercast News Service, 11/7/03)

"Jews are the objects of anti-Semitism, but Catholics and other Christians, inspired by Gibson's movie, could well become its agents. ... When violence breaks out, Mel Gibson will have a much higher authority than professors and bishops to answer to." (emphasis added; *The New Republic*, 7/28/03)

**Steve Gushee, *Palm Beach Post*:**

"Sure, Mel Gibson's film, *The Passion*, is probably anti-Semitic. The less obvious but more dangerous problem is that the movie about the death of Jesus is probably not Christian." (10/24/03)

**Rabbi Abraham B. Hecht and Rabbi Joshua S. Hecht, Rabbinical Alliance of America:**

"The message of this movie...is highly problematic for its historical inaccuracy and its message of intolerance and overt anti-Semitic overtones." (*Jerusalem Post*, 9/12/03)

**Rabbi Marvin Hier, Dean, Simon Wiesenthal Center:**

"This is a story for which millions of people throughout history paid with their lives. They were burned at the stake, killed in pogroms and the Inquisition, and it was also these ideas that served as the foundation of the Holocaust." (*Newsday* [NY], 7/22/03)

**Rabbi Marvin Hier and Harold Brackman:**

"Any film about such a sensitive subject would set off alarm bells. But a film by Gibson is particularly alarming. ... At this tinderbox moment in our new century, we need to be especially careful about a movie that has the potential to further ignite ancient hatreds." (*Los Angeles Times*, 6/22/03)

**New York State Assemblyman Dov Hikind:**

"This film can potentially lead to violence directed against the Jewish community. ...It will result in anti-Semitism and bigotry. It really takes us back to the Dark Ages...the Inquisition, the Crusades, all for the so-called sin of the Crucifixion of Jesus." (*Washington Times*, 8/29/03)

**Ken Jacobson, Associate National Director, Anti-Defamation League:**

"We have good reason to be seriously concerned about Gibson's plans to retell the Passion. Historically, the Passion—the story of the killing of Jesus—has resulted in the death of Jews." (*New York Post*, 6/21/03)

**Amy-Jill Levine, Professor of New Testament Studies, Vanderbilt University:**

"The reaction to the [Ad Hoc Committee] scholars' objections could be interpreted as anti-Semitic." (*Beliefnet.com*, 8/7/03)

**Bill Maher, comedian:**

"I do think Mel Gibson is anti-Semitic." ("Imus in the Morning," 9/24/03)

**Christopher Orlet, freelance writer:**

"It is a view guaranteed to stir anew the passions of the rabid Christian, and one that will send the Jews scurrying back to the dark corners of history." (*Salon.com*, 8/14/03)

**Fr. John T. Pawlikowski, Director of the Catholic-Jewish Studies Program, Catholic Theological Union:**

"This was one of the worst things we had seen in describing responsibility for the death of Christ in many many years." (*New York Times*, 8/2/03)

"Those who might see the film without much or any background in recent biblical interpretation will be terribly misled."  
(*The Jewish Week* [NY], 3/28/03)

**Frank Rich, *New York Times*:**

"What makes the unfolding saga of 'The Passion' hard to ignore is...the extent to which his combative marketing taps into larger angers. The 'Passion' fracas is happening not in a vacuum but in an increasingly divided America fighting a war that many on both sides see as a religious struggle."  
(9/21/03)

"These days American Jews don't have to fret too much about the charge of deicide—or didn't, until Mel Gibson started directing a privately financed movie.... Jews have already been libeled by Mr. Gibson's politicized rollout of his film. His game from the start has been to foment the old-as-Hollywood canard that the 'entertainment elite' (which just happens to be Jewish) is gunning for his Christian movie. ... But the real question here is why Mr. Gibson and his minions would go out of their way to bait Jews and sow religious conflict, especially at this fragile historical moment." (8/3/03)

**Tim Rutten, *Los Angeles Times*:**

"And as the growing controversy over Gibson's 'The Passion' spills more widely onto the nation's op-ed pages, into political magazines and even into the halls of Congress, more than rhetorical bruises are likely to be suffered. Even in steady hands, the Passion narrative is as combustible as material can be." (8/6/03)

**Myrna Shinbaum, spokeswoman, Anti-Defamation League:**

"Historically, treatment of the death of Jesus and the passion has led to the death of Jews. ... Since Vatican II in the 1960s, Catholics and Jews have worked very hard to move away from a literal interpretation [of the New Testament]. We would hope this film wouldn't set us back." (*Daily News* [NY], 6/14/03)

**Jessica Winter, *Village Voice* (NY):**

"It may instigate violence..." (11/7/03)

**Cathy Young, *Boston Globe*:**

"But in its own way, the attitude of some champions of 'The Passion' is troubling... The biblical account of Jesus' life and death should not be sacrificed to political correctness. But the cry of 'political correctness' can also become a cover for very real bigotry." (8/18/03)

**Letter, *New York Times*:**

"Mel Gibson's ability to pervert and invert scriptural teaching while claiming to uphold it leads me to think his next movie will be a stirring account of Pope Pius XII's life." (10/5/03)

**Letter, *People Magazine*:**

"After the murder of 6 million Jews, the Jewish community in the United States and worldwide should be concerned about the message being sent by Mel Gibson's film... This dangerous revision is an insult to the memory of the Holocaust and the good Christians who have tried to make amends for the ultimate crime of anti-Semitism." (9/22/03)

**Letter, *Newsday* (NY):**

"Gibson's 'The Passion' is 'just' a movie in the same way 'The Protocols of the Elders of Zion' is 'just' a book." (9/18/03)

**Sign at protest urging News Corp. not to distribute "The Passion," New York:**

"THE PASSION IS A LETHAL WEAPON AGAINST JEWS." (8/28/03)