

“SOUTH PARK” WEIGHS IN ON “THE PASSION”

The Comedy Central network aired an episode of the cartoon “South Park” dealing with “The Passion of the Christ” on March 31, titled “The Passion of the Jew.” Both Jews and Christians were objects of the show’s crude satire, though the former may find the material more objectionable than the latter.

One character, Eric Cartman, a child often portrayed as an anti-Semite, says “The Passion” shows that “Jews are the devil.” He tells his Jewish friend, Kyle Broflovski, “Go see it and tell me I’m wrong.” Kyle sees the film, and is so upset that he vomits in the theater. He wonders, “How could the Jews do that to Jesus?” Later that night, Cartman prays to a poster of “Braveheart,” while Kyle awakes screaming from a nightmare in which he is among the Jewish priests calling for Jesus’ death.

Cartman, dressed as Hitler, holds a meeting of the “Mel Gibson Fan Club”; obviously well intentioned Christians show up, and assume that his cryptic Nazi references in fact have some benign religious significance.

Two other children, Stan Marsh and Kenny McCormick, call “The Passion” a “snuff film.” Their friend Cartman explains, “He [Mel Gibson] was trying to express, through cinema, the horror and filthiness of the common Jew.” The two demand a refund from a crazed and masochistic Mel Gibson, who refuses. Claiming, “I brought the fire and brimstone back to Christianity with ‘The Passion,’” Gibson begins to sing and dance, then chases after the boys in a Mad Max truck.

Meanwhile, Kyle speaks about the guilt he feels as a Jew for the death of Jesus with a Catholic priest, who dismisses Passion plays as a relic from the Middle Ages used “to incite people against the Jews.” Inspired by the priest’s emphasis of

atonement in Christianity, Kyle announces to his outraged synagogue that the Jewish community must apologize for Jesus' death. Upon hearing that Kyle has seen "The Passion," one member shouts, "This proves the anti-Semitic effect that movie is having!" A man with an exaggerated nose and accent ironically says, "Yeah, it makes Jews into stereotypes." A grosser caricature adds, "Stereotyping Jews is *terrible!*" They then hear a passing crowd chanting a German slogan (the idea was Cartman's; the Christians agreed to it because they thought it was in Aramaic).

The Jewish congregation marches to the theater to demand that the film be pulled. Kyle cries, "Don't become an angry mob! The last time we did that we killed Jesus!" The climax occurs when Mel Gibson crashes his truck into the theater and emerges from the flames, acting insane. The Christians are disillusioned, and Stan moralizes, "Focusing on how [Jesus] got killed is what people did in the Dark Ages and it ends up with really bad results."

Kyle concludes, "Oh, dude, I feel so much better about being Jewish now that I see that Mel Gibson is just a big wacko [obscenity]."

Christian fans of the movie are depicted as easily manipulated (for example, a woman exiting the theater praises the film: "It really guilt-trips you into believing.") The only one who left the theater an anti-Semite is the one who entered as one (Cartman). The Jews, on the other hand, are shown overreacting dramatically and attempting censorship. And Kyle's final line is biting satire not only at the expense of Mel Gibson's critics, but even of the "South Park" writers themselves, who can only pooh-pooh Mel's movie by attacking the man himself.