

Mel Gibson's The Passion of the Christ: Legitimizing Anti-Semitism

An Interview with Abraham H. Foxman

- In January 2003, Mel Gibson announced that he intended to make a film that would tell the whole gospel truth about Jesus' crucifixion. The Anti-Defamation League (ADL) decided to reach out privately to Gibson for assurance that this film would not lead to charging Jews with deicide and to anti-Semitism.
- There were increasing indications that the movie was going to depict the Jews in a highly negative way. Despite a number of direct and indirect approaches, Gibson avoided contact with the ADL.
- When the film was released, it turned out to be a major commercial success. Throughout it, Gibson cast the Jews in a very negative light.
- The movie is likely to be shown in Christian circles for a long time to come. This may harm the image of Jews among Christians.

Abraham H. Foxman is the national director of the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) in the United States. After that interview, he relates, many people contacted the ADL. "We did not react publicly but decided that we should reach out to Gibson, and we wrote him a letter on 24 March 2003. We said we wanted to be assured that his film 'will not give rise to the old canard of charging Jews with deicide, and to anti-Semitism.'

"The letter went on to note that 'Passion plays have an infamous history of leading to hatred, violence, and even the death of Jews. Given your talent and celebrity, how you depict the death of Jesus will have widespread influence on people's ideas, attitudes, and behavior toward Jews today.'¹

"It is well known that Gibson belongs to a traditionalist right-wing Catholic sect that rejects Vatican II reforms, including the *Nostra Aetate* statement. This document repudiates the deicide charge against all Jews for the crucifixion of Jesus."

When to Go Public?

Foxman says the question of when to go public with an issue is often very delicate for the ADL. "In this specific case, people have accused us of reacting to Gibson's movie because we needed the publicity. I strongly believe that after the Shoah, Jews no longer have the luxury to remain silent in the face of anti-Semitism, even if some media and other people say that we should. Our first approach should not necessarily be a public one, and it was not in this case. We understood that Mel Gibson was a Hollywood icon and that it would be best to avoid a public confrontation if possible. This was not a fight of our own choosing.

"After we sent the letter, we received a call from Gibson's agent, Alan Nierob. He mentioned that he was Jewish and supported Jewish causes. He considered our letter very respectful and said Gibson would like to meet us. We never heard from him to set up such a meeting. The ADL did nothing further publicly because often issues recede by themselves.

"Then we received a call from Father John Pawlikowski, a Catholic priest from Chicago active for many years in interfaith dialogue and very instrumental in Catholic-Jewish relations. Father Pawlikowski told us that one of his interfaith contacts had obtained a copy of Gibson's script from someone who worked on the movie and was very disturbed by it."

Analyzing the Script

"Father Pawlikowski suggested that a joint committee of Catholics and Jews be set up to analyze the script of *The Passion*. Dr. Eugene Fisher of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) and Rabbi Dr. Eugene Korn, then of the ADL, jointly put together a nine-person panel. The Catholic panelists were all members of an appointed advisory committee that offers advice to the U.S. bishops on developments in Catholic-Jewish relations.²

"The study group concluded that a film based on the script they had been shown would promote anti-Semitic sentiments. It assessed that 'the Temple-and by extension Judaism-is presented as a locus of evil.... A Jewish mob is shown in ever-increasing size and ferocity. The mob is plainly identified as representing the Jewish people as a whole, portraying them as such as "bloodthirsty," "frenzied," and "predatory"...Jewish figures are particularly associated with evil uses of money.'

"The scholars also agreed that the script contained significant historical errors. For instance, it 'fundamentally misconceives the relationship between the prefect,

Pontius Pilate, and the Temple authorities led by Caiaphas. Caiaphas served at Rome's pleasure. Yet the script shows him bullying Pontius Pilate with an amazing control of the Jewish mob. Pilate even states he fears Caiaphas is plotting a revolt. This is a total reversal of the historical reality of Judea under Roman rule.' The scholars group remarked that 'in the time of Jesus, Romans crucified those Jews they suspected of sedition routinely.... There is absolutely no evidence that crosses of any kind were built by Jews in the Temple.'

"Another conclusion was that 'dramatically, as the script stands, Jesus' opponents are one-dimensional bad guys.... The film takes every opportunity to embellish the violence of the passion, thereby increasing the likelihood of an audience to be filled with outrage at those who perpetuated such a horrendous crime.' The group added: 'Viewers without extensive knowledge of Catholic teaching about interpreting the New Testament will surely leave the theater with the overriding impression that the bloodthirsty, vengeful and money-loving Jews simply had an implacable hatred of Jesus.'"³

Reaching Out Again

"After the study was completed, we decided to reach out again privately to Mel Gibson, and we approached him in the name of the joint study group in May 2003. His office replied that he wanted to meet us for a discussion. There were, for a short period, contacts between Eugene Fisher and Gibson's Icon Productions.

"The next development was that the USCCB received a letter threatening that Gibson would sue us for having stolen property unless we immediately returned all copies of the script. We did so, with return receipt requested.

"We still had hoped there would be an opportunity for discussion. Gibson, however, went public with the story that we had stolen his script. We then made it known in June 2003 that we had shared with him our findings in the hope of a constructive dialogue. We also made the analysis of the script public."⁴

"This led to a barrage of anti-Semitic emails and phone calls. They included references to a Jewish conspiracy and Jewish control as well as the charge of deicide. Our positions regarding the movie were often distorted. On 13 August 2003, the ADL released to the public a sampling of the hate mail."⁵

Limited Showings

"Gibson reacted by saying the script we had studied was an old one and that his film was still 'a work in progress.' He also said he was consulting rabbis and other scholars. Then Gibson decided to begin limited showings of an early version of *The Passion*. Those invited to the screenings in July and August were primarily Evangelical ministers as well as some Catholics.

"Some of our Christian friends saw the movie. One important Evangelical said to us, 'As a Christian, I cried. But if I were Jewish, I would worry.' He tried to arrange a meeting between Gibson and us-yet another failed attempt to start a dialogue.

"Gibson then contacted conservative Jewish media figures such as Dennis Prager and Michael Medved. I called Prager and pointed out the dangerous potential of a Hollywood icon producing a movie to be seen by millions that claims the Jews killed Jesus. When I asked whether he could talk to Gibson, he replied that he had already done so but had made no impact."

Gibson's New Yorker Interview

"It gradually became clear that Gibson had never intended to talk to us. There were many intermediaries who tried. Gibson's agent, however, kept calling to say a meeting would be set up."

In September 2003, Gibson gave an interview to Peter Boyer that appeared in the *New Yorker* on the 15th of that month. "This became a turning point. It said, among other things: 'Gibson originally shot a scene, based on Saint Matthew's Gospel, that pictured Caiaphas, a Jewish high priest, calling down a curse on the Jews for killing Jesus, but he has chosen not to include it. "I wanted it in," he says. "My brother said that I was wimping out if I didn't include it. It happened; it was said, but man, if I included that in there, they'd be coming after me at my house, they'd come kill me."⁶

"This interview showed that Gibson believed in the libel of the Jewish world conspiracy. Shortly thereafter his father, Hutton Gibson, a self-proclaimed Holocaust denier, gave an interview. Commenting on his father, Mel Gibson said, 'My dad taught me my faith, and I believe what he taught me. The man never lied to me in his life.'⁷

Foxman explains why he never accused Gibson of anti-Semitism: "I was always very careful not to do so. When the movie was seen by the public, I was criticized on two accounts-that I had attacked Gibson for being an anti-Semite, and that I didn't call him an anti-Semite."

Foxman maintained this approach as the issue evolved. "I kept saying that the film could fuel anti-Semitism yet that Gibson was entitled to present the gospel as he saw it. I pointed out that the danger was that he was marketing it as the gospel truth."

Foxman adds: "Throughout this debate, Jews in Hollywood were silent. We tried to get them involved but to no avail. Most of those we approached replied evasively that they had not seen the film and could not yet take a position.

"Only Kirk Douglas had the courage to speak his mind, attacking Gibson for doing 'a disservice to both [Catholics and Jews]' in a letter published in *People* magazine in March 2004. By now others have certainly seen it and they are still not reacting."

A Tremendous Disadvantage

"Increasingly, journalists who had seen the film wrote that they liked it and were moved by it. We were at a great disadvantage as media people said we were basing ourselves on an old script. Gibson had stated he had been continually adjusting it.

"Increasingly, people said, 'How does Foxman prejudge a film he hasn't seen?' I said that I was responding to what the producers wrote that they would do. Later in Houston some of our Jewish friends were invited to see the movie, and they confirmed our views. I then decided that to make my reaction credible, I had to see it too.

"In December 2003, there were rumors that the Pope had seen the movie and reacted positively. We clarified that we respected his statement and that John Paul II had a 'record and history of sensitivity to the Jewish community.'⁸ A senior Vatican official later denied the Pope had commented on the movie.⁹

"Gibson decided to show the movie at the Beyond All Limits Conference, a convention of ministers in Orlando, Florida, at the end of January 2004. I asked my colleague Rabbi Gary Bretton-Granatoor to register us. We registered by email first as 'Center of Truth' and were rejected. Then we tried 'Institute of Truth' and were again turned down. Finally we tried 'Church of Truth,' of which I presented myself as executive director while Rabbi Bretton-Granatoor went as the reverend. This time we were accepted.

"When registering for the conference, one received a nametag. If you wanted to see the movie, you had to register at another desk and sign a pledge that you could only speak about the movie if you liked it. Our lawyers advised us that such a pledge is not valid.

"When you signed the pledge, the organizers put a 'G' in black marker on your left hand. I did that myself and never signed the document. In the cinema I sat next to a church minister from a major Christian denomination. She asked what the Church of Truth from Brooklyn was, and I answered, 'A Jewish church.' She said, 'Welcome.'"

Yet Another Attempt

"I realized that *The Passion* is the kind of movie that cannot be detoxified. In a second ADL letter to Mel Gibson on 23 January 2004, I stated, 'It is our hope that you might consider a movie postscript with you coming on screen at the end to implore your viewers to not let the movie turn some toward a passion of hatred.' We added, 'We know that you have taken a great spiritual responsibility on your shoulders to present the Passion as you see it in your heart. We can only hope that your Passion will move all people in a positive way and we again hope that we can be your partners in this critical enterprise.'

"Gibson replied to me on 30 January with a vague letter not proposing anything. 'You are right in mentioning that "diplomacy by press-release is no diplomacy at all" and it is my sincerest of regrets that events conspired for us to just miss each other when we both recently happened to be in Orlando.

"'You are a man of integrity and a man of faith and I do not take your concerns lightly. It is my deepest belief, as I am sure it is yours, that all who ever breathe life on this Earth are children of God and my most binding obligation to them, as a brother in this waking world, is to love them.'"¹⁰

Foxman wrote back to Gibson that his words did not mitigate the issues he had raised in his first letter to him of March 2003. The reply concluded: "So far you have not responded to our request of 11 months for us to meet. We look forward to having the opportunity to meet with you to further discuss our concerns."¹¹

Cecil B. DeMille's Precedent

"An Evangelical minister wrote a column in which he said that I was right. He said Gibson should clarify at the beginning or end of the movie that the Romans crucified 250,000 Jews and that only one rose. It is a somewhat similar concept to what I wanted.

"PAX, a Christian network, advertised that they would run a two-hour documentary on the movie shortly before its previews. We contacted them, and

they decided to include a statement at the end of the documentary: 'Be careful not to convert this film into hatred.'

"Later a journalist discovered that what we had been asking for was not unique. In the late 1920s, Cecil B. DeMille made a silent movie titled *King of Kings* that sparked a similar debate. DeMille reacted by editing the movie and adding an introduction. So we found out that what we had asked of Gibson had already been done once before, many decades ago."

Foxman comments: "What we were asking was not outlandish, un-American, or opposed to our national traditions. We had hoped all the time, in vain, that a discussion with Gibson would lead to some amelioration."

No Changes from the Original Script

"When I saw the movie in Orlando, it was evident that no significant changes had been made in the original script. At the end of the performance, a minister got up and asked everybody to kneel to pray to Jesus. There must have been some five thousand people in the audience. Perhaps twenty did not kneel-presumably rabbis who went in as I did. My colleague and I then decided to describe our impressions of the film in an op-ed.¹²

"I saw the film a second time on 25 February, the day it opened in movie theaters, and realized once again that there were no changes. Now ADL was jeered because there were no pogroms after the movie. We replied that we had never predicted there would be. All we had said was that it would reinforce and legitimize anti-Semitic attitudes. More millions of people will see this than have seen the Passion Plays for over two thousand years.

"When the movie opened, Gibson gave a number of interviews. We were now again criticized. Some said I should become his partner because I had enabled him to earn all those millions, thanks to the publicity we gave him. It would have been impossible, however, to remain silent. The movie is the reincarnation of a story that became the legitimate basis for centuries of expulsions, murders, and discrimination against Jews."

A Witness from the Movie

Foxman relates the story of an Italian Jewish female scholar whom Gibson had hired as an Aramaic expert. "Her brother told me she had struggled whether to leave or not because she was disturbed by the film's content. She decided to stay, considering that her being there would make it less toxic and anti-Semitic.

When changes failed to be made, she asked not to have her name mentioned in the movie's credits.

"She later went public on some matters. She told that there had been a scene at the Passover Seder; the disciples were sitting at the Last Supper and a lamb was brought in and slaughtered with a knife. The blood flowed while the Jews celebrated. She had told Gibson that Jews do not kill animals at the Seder, though there was such a sacrifice in the Temple. Gibson responded that he wanted to show the barbarity of the Jews, bringing in a sheep, slaughtering it, and having a lot of blood running, at a feast.

"The woman went to a rabbi and received a letter confirming her statement, and Gibson removed the scene. She also challenged him when he portrayed the guards at the Temple armed to the teeth with swords and bayonets. She explained that Jewish law prohibited weapons in the Temple. Gibson did not want to change the scene. She again went to a rabbi and obtained a letter explaining this, and Gibson disarmed the guards.

"Her impression was that Gibson was looking for every opportunity to cast the Jews in a negative light. He was cherry-picking the ugly things about the Jews."

A Nun's Visions

Foxman explains the underlying source for the script. "Gibson based his script on the mystical visions of Ann-Catherine Emmerich, a nun who lived in Germany in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. She was beatified in October 2004 by Pope John Paul II, which indicates the Catholic Church's attitude toward her.¹³

"A critical look at the movie shows that on every occasion Gibson chose to blame the Jews. All the Romans, except for the four who tortured Jesus, are portrayed as kind, loving, and forgiving. Even the four cruel soldiers at the end undergo a revelation of Christ as a superhuman being. The Jews are portrayed as unforgiving from the beginning to the end.

"A typical result was that when a viewer in Manhattan was interviewed by a newspaper as he exited the movie, the man said he cried. When asked about his thirteen- or fourteen-year-old daughter, he said she had asked him why the Jews hated Jesus so much.

"Our argument throughout had been that Gibson was entitled to his theological belief that Jesus died for all people's sins. But what does that mean to a young person who doesn't see this on a spiritual, theological level? What sins did he or she commit? What youngsters see are the Jews using a Roman nobody, Pontius Pilate, for their evil purposes. Thus they must conclude that the Jews really are Satan."

Limiting the Damage

"To limit the damage we created a debate. At least during the time the movie was playing in the theaters, this was viewed as a discussion.

"We had to remind our Christian friends throughout what Hitler said when he saw a Passion Play. He remarked that he wished every person in the world would see it, because then they would understand why he so despised the Jews. We also had to remind our Christian friends about the impact these plays have had on history. I also told them that many of those who murdered Jews during the week went to church on Sunday. They often said that they were not killing Jews but Christ-killers.

"An important contribution was made by the Bishops' Committee for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs (BCEIA), which published a collection of key documents of Catholic teaching on the Church's relationship to the Jews and its opposition to anti-Semitism. It also included the BCEIA's 1988 'Criteria for the Evaluation of Dramatizations of the Passion.' The BCEIA said that the idea for the book had been raised by Cardinal William H. Keeler, the Episcopal moderator for Catholic Jewish relations."¹⁴

Media Reactions

"*Newsweek* gave the matter a cover story and so did *U.S. News & World Report*. CNN and NBC each presented a two-hour special. ABC offered a one-hour special. Several movie critics reacted very negatively. In a lengthy 1 March 2004 review in the *New Yorker*, David Denby said Gibson was in danger of changing Jesus' message of love into one of hate. He added that Gibson may have committed an aggression not only against Jews but also against Christian believers, asking, 'How, I wonder, will people become better Christians if they are filled with the guilt, anguish, or loathing that this movie may create in their souls?'"¹⁵

"In the *Boston Globe*, a review by James Carroll was titled 'An Obscene Portrayal of Christ's Passion.' He wrote: 'The subject of this film, despite its title, is not the Passion of the Christ, but the sick love of physical abuse.... Jews as presented in this movie are overwhelmingly negative. Roman soldiers brutally execute Jesus, but Pontius Pilate is a good man, who stands in dramatic contrast to Caiaphas, the Jewish High Priest. Going well beyond anything in the Gospels, Gibson's film emphasizes Roman virtue and Jewish venality.'"¹⁶

"In the meantime various Jewish sources attacked both Rabbi Marvin Hier, dean of the Simon Wiesenthal Center, and me. One of these was the *Forward* weekly. It reported that one rabbi had said on a Pat Robertson program that the ADL and its allies were 'dangerous organizations that are driving a wedge between American Jews and Christians.' One extremist rabbi even performed a mystical ceremony wishing us dead because, he said, we were undermining the security and safety of the Jewish people. Some Jewish leaders claimed it would have been better to let the Christians speak out against the movie first."¹⁷

Questions Now Being Asked

Foxman says that the questions currently being asked, mainly in the Jewish community, are: "Why didn't we ignore it? Did we have to confront it? Was it worth it?" He adds: "I also get asked whether, if I had to do it over again, I would do the same. My answer is that we have to understand that most of the millions of people who went to see the movie did not go because of the controversy and publicity around it. Most were people who never go to a film, for whom Hollywood is anathema because it is liberalism and pornography.

"Gibson was, however, able to catalyze a religious crusade. *The Passion* was marketed in churches in the vein of 'this is a way to bring Jesus back into the church.' The largest part of the audience were not the people who listened to me.

"What could we do more? We obtained a statement from Franklin Graham, son of the Evangelist Billy Graham. We got statements from other Evangelical leaders such as Gary Bauer and Jerry Falwell. Ted Haggerty talked about the dangers of the film. They told people that one had to be careful not to turn this movie into hatred of the Jews."

Foxman summarizes his position: "In the context of Jewish history we did not have the luxury to say, being spit in the face, that it rained. If Gibson had gotten away without being challenged, the Jewish community would have indicated that anything is all right if one is powerful enough, comes from Hollywood, and is an icon."

Foxman adds: "I know from my own experience that one can show a Passion Play in a way that is not anti-Semitic. I saw that in a recent version of the famous one of Oberammergau in Bavaria, Germany."

A Cultural War

Foxman points out that the "Gibson affair" plays against the background of what is perceived as a cultural war. "Several recent polls of the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press indicate that over 60 percent of Americans believe that religion, and in particular Christianity, is under attack. An overwhelming majority say we should have prayer and the Ten Commandments in school.

When asked who is responsible for the attack, people think of the media, Hollywood, and the ACLU. All three are perceived to be largely Jewish, even if they are not necessarily so.

"This also takes place in a reality where Americans think the United States is not religious enough, while Europeans believe it is too religious. In Europe the movie did not have a similar impact because Europe is largely atheist."

Foxman observes: "The United States is not immune to anti-Semitism, though the situation is definitely better than in Europe. Here, people who commit anti-Semitic acts often have to pay a price. For U.S. politicians it is not politically correct to be an anti-Semite."

Poll Indicates Increasing Anti-Semitism

Foxman says the ADL has not yet polled specifically on the impact of Gibson's movie because it takes longer than a year to measure this. "Yet we included a question in the ADL polls about whether the Jews are responsible for killing Jesus and the figure went up from 25 to 30 percent. We cannot say this results from the movie but it had been constant before."¹⁸

"A Pew poll showed a similar trend, and concluded that a growing minority of Americans, 26 percent, believe Jews were responsible for Christ's death. An ABC News survey in 1997 found the figure to be 19 percent.

"The main increases in the Pew poll were among young people and African Americans. Currently, 34 percent of those below age 30 and 42 percent of blacks attribute Christ's death to Jews. The corresponding figures in the 1997 poll were 10 percent and 21 percent, respectively.

"The Pew poll found, furthermore, that a relatively large proportion of people who have seen the movie (36 percent) blame Jews for Christ's death. However, this was also the case among people who *planned* to see the movie (29 percent), suggesting people who are drawn to this film may be more predisposed to this opinion than others. By comparison, just 17 percent of those who had no plans to see the movie blamed Christ's death on Jews."¹⁹

Looking Backward

Foxman explains: "I am often asked why I did not call Gibson an anti-Semite.²⁰ I understood that many good Christians would see the movie to undergo the catharsis of Jesus' suffering. I did not want them to feel that this involved anti-Semitism because it would cast doubt on the feelings of all these people. Jews saw it with their eyes and through their history. This history has been used to legitimize our destruction."

Foxman says he is often asked what he would have said to Gibson had he met him. He answers: "I would tell him what role the Passion has played in our history. On the one hand, I would express our respect for his faith and for the need of Christians to have a Passion. On the other, I would spell out for him how it has been abused and therefore tell him to be careful. I would warn him that this spectacle would attract millions of people and should not become a means for those who want to foment hate. I believe, perhaps naively, that had he listened he would not have adopted all of Emmerich's vision, which more or less came down to the view that Pontius Pilate was a righteous man.

"This accords with my broader worldview. I start every day with a greater faith in humankind than my experience warrants. I believe that there are more good people than bad people. Perhaps things would have gone differently if I had spoken to him. Many Hollywood people could have been intermediaries but didn't want to be."

The DVDs Prolong the Danger

Foxman points out that the DVD and private video versions of this movie, which were released in summer 2005, extend its danger into the future. He comments: "The Passion will for many years be shown in churches to children in a context without perspective."

Indeed, in September 2004 a statement of concerned Christians from all over the world, signed by academics, theologians, clergymen, and others, warned of the dangers of this release. It remarked: "Passion plays have had a painful and violent impact on Jewish communities from medieval times into our own. Those who portrayed the Passion may never have intended direct harm to their Jewish neighbors, but such plays often did poison attitudes and incite violence against Jewish communities, sometimes with lethal consequences. Not only in the immediate response to a particular portrayal, but also in shaping a persistently negative image of Jews even among people of generally good will. Passion plays have played an influential role in long centuries of Christian anti-Judaism."

The statement added: "the film includes numerous explicitly anti-Jewish elements that we consider an affront to the gospel....We must dissent from the views of Christian colleagues who commend the film and its virtues while ignoring its serious defects. Those who uncritically promote this film, looking only to its benefits for their own faith communities, turn a deaf ear to the suffering that such portrayals of the Passion have evoked, even in recent memory. This insensitivity is inexcusable."²¹

When asked what should be done now, Foxman says: "2005 was the fortieth anniversary of the *Nostra Aetate* declaration by Pope Paul VI, which eliminated the Jews' collective guilt for Jesus' crucifixion. Several international conferences were devoted to it. This declaration, however, has made only a limited impact. In

the meantime the movie is circulating, and unless people expose what it is, it may well be the new gospel for the coming twenty years. That is why the work of exposing it must go on."

Interviewed by Manfred Gerstenfeld

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Notes

1. www.adl.org/media_watch/letter_mel_gibson.asp.
2. Its members were Dr. Mary C. Boys, Dr. Michael C. Cook, Dr. Philip A. Cunningham, Dr. Eugene J. Fisher, Dr. Paula Fredriksen, Rev. Dr. Lawrence E. Frizzell, Rabbi Dr. Eugene Korn, Dr. Amy-Jill Levine, and Dr. John T. Pawlikowski.
3. Report of the Ad Hoc Scholars Group Reviewing the Script of *The Passion*, 2 May 2003.
4. ADL Press Release, "ADL's Statement on Mel Gibson's 'The Passion,'" 24 June 2003. This also refers to a statement on 17 June by the Catholic scholars in the group, www.adl.org/presrele/mise_00/4275_00.asp. See also Abraham H. Foxman, "Gibson's Passion," *New York Sun*, 4 August 2003.
5. "ADL Criticism of Mel Gibson's 'The Passion' Elicits Anti-Semitic Responses," posted on ADL website 13 August 2003, www.adl.org/anti_semitism/anti-semitic-responses.asp.
6. "This Week in the New Yorker (Mel Gibson interview)," 7 September 2003, <http://209.157.64.200/focus/f-religion/978741/posts>.
7. *New York Post*, 30 January 2004.
8. ADL Press Release, "ADL Reacts to Reports the Pope Has Screened Mel Gibson's Film 'The Passion,'" 17 December 2003, www.adl.org/PresRele/Vatican/Jewish_96/4430_96.htm/.
9. Catholic News Service, 24 December 2003.
10. www.adl.org/Interfaith/Letter_gibson_to_adl/asp?&MSHiC=1252&L=10&W=mel+gi.
11. Letter from Abe Foxman to Mel Gibson, 2 February 2004,

www.adl.org/Interfaith/Letter_gibson2.asp.

12. Abraham H. Foxman and Rabbi Gary Bretton-Granatoor, "'Passion' Relies on the Theme of Anti-Semitism," *Palm Beach Post*, 25 January 2004.

13. For more detail on this and other aspects of the Passion affair, see Sergio Minerbi, "*The Passion* by Mel Gibson: Enthusiastic Response in the Catholic World, Restrained Criticism by the Jews" *Jewish Political Studies Review*, Vol. 17, Nos. 1 & 2 (Spring 2005), 119-33.

14. "Bishops' Committee Issues Collection of Documents on 'The Bible, the Jews, and the Death of Jesus,'" 11 February 2004, www.usccb.org/comm/archives/2004/04-024.htm.

15. David Denby, "Nailed," *New Yorker*, 1 March 2004.

16. James Carroll, "An Obscene Portrayal of Christ's Passion," *Boston Globe*, 24 February 2004.

17. Nacha Cattan, "'Passion' Critics Endanger Jews, Angry Rabbis Claim, Attacking Groups, Foxman," *Forward*, 5 March 2004.

18. ADL survey on "American Attitudes towards Jews," conducted 1-4 December 2003 by the Marttila Communications Group, www.adl.org/PresRele/ASUS_12/4454_12.htm; Pew Center for the People and the Press, March 2004, people-press.org/reports/display.php3?ReportID=209.

19. Pew Research Center, "Belief that Jews Were Responsible for Christ's Death," 2 April 2004.

20. See also Abraham H. Foxman and Rabbi Garry Bretton-Granatoor, "'Passion' Needs Postscript," *Daily News*, 3 February 2004.

21. "'The Passion of the Christ,' Jewish Pain, and Christian Responsibility: A Response to Mel Gibson's Film," A Statement by Concerned Christians, September 2004. It was posted on the website of the Institute for Jewish-Christian Understanding, www.muhlenberg.edu/cultural/ijcu/.

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Abraham H. Foxman was born in Baranowicz, Poland, in 1940 and survived the Second World War in Vilna by assuming a Catholic identity. In 1946, he was subject to a custody battle in Soviet courts. In 1950, he went with his parents to the United States where he studied at the Yeshiva of Flatbush, City College, and New York University Law School. He began working at the Anti-Defamation League in 1965 and became its national director in 1987.

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