

Council of Centers on Jewish-Christian Relations



Statement on the Controversies Surrounding Mel Gibson's *The Passion of Christ*

There has been growing discussion in the media and among the general public concerning Mel Gibson's film, *The Passion of Christ*, scheduled for release in February. We, directors or personnel of the twenty-five member organizations of the Council of Centers on Jewish-Christian Relations, have been monitoring this developing conversation for many months. We wish to offer assistance to our communities as they struggle with the difficult questions that this film is raising.

These questions arise because, while the events of the Passion are central to Christian faith, elements of their portrayal, particularly in popular Passion Plays, have often been theologically and morally problematic. Specifically, their portrayal of Jews collectively as killers of Christ has historically fomented hatred and violence toward Jews. In the wake of the Holocaust, the Roman Catholic Church and all major Protestant denominations have officially rejected the claim of deicide and collective Jewish guilt for the death of Jesus. In a world where antisemitism is on the rise, these teachings take on new urgency.

We call on Christian leaders, in the United States and throughout the world, publicly to affirm their churches' teachings on appropriate portrayals and interpretations of the Passion and to make these teachings readily available to the general public. And we ask that all people seek to model the behaviors of justice, honesty, and compassion that have led to the enormous progress in Christian-Jewish relations in the past forty years.

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