

Gibson's anti-Semitic rant nothing to shrug off

I wasn't going to write about religion this week. But that was before Mel Gibson blamed me and every Jew for "all the wars in the world." Gibson directed, bankrolled and made millions off a film called "The Passion of the Christ;" Some of you may have heard of it.

Sure, he was drunk. Pulled over for a DUI, he demanded, "Are you a Jew?" Thrown into lockup, he made a crude comment about the female sergeant on duty, and called an officer a "f***ing Jew." Since then, he has apologized many times. I'm unimpressed.

Jews have been called the "People of Memory." Does anyone remember the hoopla around town surrounding the release of "The Passion?" The special preview for local evangelical leaders? The fawning presentations from local pastors who swore their buddy Mel "hasn't an anti-Semitic bone in his body?" I sat through one. I remember.

We all remember. Jews remember the expulsion from France in 1182. England in 1290. Spain in 1492. We were nearly exterminated out of Europe in World War II. Hitler saw the Obergammegau passion play and wanted everyone to see it: "Never has the menace of Jewry been so convincingly portrayed." I've spoken to Holocaust survivors. They remember.

Many of you are Christian. Many of you saw "The Passion." You found it inspiring, it strengthened your faith and you hoped it would bring others to Christ. You are sorry about Gibson's remarks, but clearly that was booze talking. You know that Mel is a flawed human being, but we all are. We should be forgiving and understanding.

These are kind, charitable and authentically Christian impulses. But they should be informed by the knowledge that Gibson's father is an unrepentant anti-Semite and Holocaust denier. Gibson has said that his father "taught me my faith, and I believe what he taught me." You should also know Gibson's "radical traditionalist" Catholic sect rejects the reforms of Vatican II, in which Jews were absolved of the crime of deicide ("killing God").

But most importantly, Gibson's film relies on a non-Gospel source: The so-called visions of an anti-Semitic Catholic nun.

Anne Catherine Emmerich lived in the 19th century. She claimed to have produced stigmata, and to miraculously sustain herself without food. Examinations by the church provided no support for either of these claims.

Nonetheless, she published a book in 1833 claiming to have traveled back in time to wit-



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ness the last moments of Jesus' life. This book, "The Dolorous Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ," was described by Gibson as being "great background and foundation material" for his film.

Emmerich's influence on "The Passion" is obvious. The wiping up of flagellation blood, the vivid character portrayals of Pilate and Caiaphas, the minute details of the last hours of Jesus life, all these come from her "visions." Not the Gospels.

These visions constantly refer to "the wicked Jews," "the hard-hearted Jews" and "the cruel Jews." According to one biographer, Emmerich saw an "old Jewess" who admitted "Jews in our country and elsewhere strangled Christian children and used their blood for . . . diabolical practices."

It's no coincidence that "The Passion" is filled with blood, blood and more blood. Gibson's original vision was even gorier. A pre-release version had a scene where a lamb is killed at a Passover Seder and blood flows everywhere, while Jews sit idly by and eat their meal.

The association of blood with our Passover ritual is straight out of the "blood libel," a very old and horrible anti-Semitic myth that has been responsible for the deaths of thousands of Jews since the Middle Ages. Gibson's biblical scholar was so ashamed of her association with "The Passion" she had her name removed from the credits.

I knew much of this when the film came out, but said nothing. I remained silent because I didn't think anybody would listen. I'd just be another member of the Jewish Media Conspiracy obsessing over anti-Semitism.

But I also hoped to remember. I hoped when people were ready to listen, I would speak.

Now, thanks to the inhibition-removing properties of alcohol, people are listening. Gibson has been very public with his apologies, blaming his outbursts on "the disease of alcoholism" and asking for Jewish help. We have responded in kind, inviting Gibson to speak at a Beverly Hills synagogue on Yom Kippur.

Yom Kippur is the holiest day in Judaism. If Gibson accepts, he'll be speaking to all Jews everywhere. Doubtless he'll ask us to forgive and forget.

Forgive, maybe. Forget, never. We are the Am-Hazikaron: The People of Memory.

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