

# Prejudice

by: Rabbi Jeremy Rosen

I guess the media (and I) needed a break from Lebanon, since they have got so excited over Mel Gibson's drunken outburst against Jews for running the world and being the cause of all human suffering. You mean you didn't know that that's what millions of people really think?

Three years ago I was invited to a private screening of Gibson's notorious film about *The Passion*. I thought it was pornographically violent, but I was struck by the devotion of the mainly Christian audience. I actually burst out laughing at one point, much to the annoyance of everyone else, when the two Mary's are in a room and they sense that the hero has been arrested. The walls tremble and they utter the only lines in Hebrew in the film (the rest is Aramaic or Latin), "Ma Nishtana HaLaylah HaZe," "Why is this night different than all other nights!" Obviously someone advised Gibson that this was a suitable reference to Passover. One Christian academic, no friend of the Jews, agreed with me on a subsequent BBC discussion that the film was a reflection of a medieval, masochistic, self-flagellating version of Christianity that he found offensive and barbaric. At the time I said:

The trouble with Gibson and his disturbed father is that they belong to a Catholic sect that thinks the present Pope has gone too far in being nice to the Jews. Gibson's father quite openly thinks the Holocaust never happened. So one is bound to wonder about Gibson's motives and, sadly, why the conservatives of the Vatican have triumphed once again over the progressives and refused to qualify the film themselves. In the past, after Easter sermons about the crucifixion, maddened crowds poured out of churches to attack the local Jews in revenge for killing Jesus. But if I were you I wouldn't worry about this happening after this film. Much more likely is that parents will make for the nearest candy store to soothe their children upset by such crude, bloody violence. Gibson has indeed stirred up a hornet's nest when he might have contributed to a genuine upswing in brotherhood and spirituality. But the more fuss that is made in public rather than in private, the more publicity he'll get and the more he'll laugh all the way to the bank.

I did not agree at the time that we Jews should make a fuss. If the film was going to create more anti-Semitism, that was their problem to deal with rather than ours.

This week I have really enjoyed hearing Jacky Mason's view on American TV:

Leave Mel aloin! He vas dronk so vat! If vee boddered abaat evry dronk who sed somtink hateful about oder Americans, den hoyf of

America vood end up 'n Jayl. Oll dese guys who make a living looking for hatred, dey are sick. Abe Foxman shoud get a proper job.

Of course, Jacky is a comedian, not a serious pundit. But in one way he's right. The Ku Klux Klan is a far bigger problem than Mel Gibson. So is Islamofascism, where most anti-Semitism comes from nowadays. Two-time Presidential candidate Pat Buchanan has said far worse things, repeatedly, and yet he's still on TV regularly. And it's barely fifty years since universities did away with restrictions on Jewish applicants.

Certainly Gibson has a serious problem, but then that's not news to anyone who has seen his version of religion. As we say "Nichnas Yayin Yatza Sod," "When wine goes in a secret comes out." Obviously there are deep feelings under the surface. He has other hatreds apart from Jews, too. In *The Patriot* and *Braveheart* he made all English out to be either sadistic bastards or bumbling incompetents. Scottish Clan leaders were depicted as corrupt, self-serving hypocrites, and homosexuals were pathetic cowards and incompetents.

The truth is we are all prejudiced one way or another. As Shakespeare says in Hamlet, clothes tell us a lot about a person. We all tend to judge by externals, sometimes trivially, sometimes seriously, otherwise why so much plastic surgery? We accept received generalizations, biased histories, and most humans make assumptions that are often proved to be totally false. Have you never heard an Orthodox rabbi, let alone a common and garden Jew, say awful things about Goyim, how they are all corrupt drunkards who'd as soon kill every Jew as have a ham sandwich? Most Britons I know are prejudiced against Gypsies and Tinkers and wouldn't want them moving in next door. You think I don't have a problem with Chelsea (for soccer fans only)? Sure, some prejudices are worse and more serious than others. It's just that some of us try our level best to overcome our prejudices because we really do believe what our scriptures tell us—that God created all humankind!

Frankly I think the "rabbi" (See—prejudice again!) who invited Gibson to speak in his synagogue on Yom Kippur has a much bigger problem if that is his idea of a spiritually uplifting guest preacher on the most holy day in the Jewish calendar. Invite his father, why don't you, and get him to explain why the Holocaust never happened.

Yes, Gibson has a problem, and his religion hasn't helped deal with it so far, which does make me wonder whether he'll really seek help. But let's see. Perhaps. Who knows? Meanwhile let's not play the Hollywood game of Saints and Sinners.

We are faced with such enormous and murderous hatred at this moment that the ravings of a drunken Hollywood producer surely comes way down on our list of priorities. Crying wolf, or making a fuss over every such case, will lose us support on the real challenges.

If we are worried about Gibson's sick mind, then what ought we to be doing about those diseases called Ahmadinejad and Chavez?

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