

## 'Jews Killed Jesus' Sign Causing Controversy

### ***Pastor Refuses To Remove Or Change Saying On Outdoor Marquee***

POSTED: 9:41 AM MST February 25, 2004  
UPDATED: 4:45 PM MST February 25, 2004

**DENVER** -- A billboard unveiled on Ash Wednesday, the same day that a controversial movie depicting the last hours of Jesus Christ premiered, is sparking criticism from people of all faiths.



The large-size outdoor marquee, which sits on the property of the Lovingway United Pentecostal Church at Colorado and Mississippi, says, "Jews Killed The Lord Jesus" and the word "Settled!"

"It's settled," said Maurice Gordon, Loveway pastor. "The word of God is the final word."

The Anti-Defamation League asked for the marquee to be changed because it is anti-Semitic, but the church only amended the billboard slightly by removing the word "settled" and attributing the line to biblical Scriptures.

That, however, is still not appeasing critics.

"Immediately, I picked up the phone and called the pastor and had a spirited but good and respectful discussion with him in which I tried to explain to him that that kind of message is divisive and exactly the kind of message which has fueled anti-Semitism for thousands of years," said Bruce DeBoskey, the Mountain States Regional Director for the Anti-Defamation League.

"If I can get people to rediscover their bible...if I can get people to go back and look...what does it actually say?" asked Gordon.

Jewish leaders say that like Mel Gibson's new movie "The Passion of The Christ" -- which opened Wednesday morning -- the passage will stir up anti-Semitic attitudes and will cause some people to lash out at Jews.

The Colorado Council of Churches also tried to get Pastor Maurice Gordon to change the sign but he refused and wouldn't even answer the phone or answer the door, 7NEWS reported.

Rev. Jim Ryan, a spokesman for the council, was quick to point out that it is a small minority who feel this way about Jews and that most Christians don't share that sentiment. Although the "Jews Killed the Lord Jesus" line comes from First Thessalonians, second chapter, verses 14 and 15, many Christian scholars interpret that passage to mean that when Paul refers to the Jews, he is referring to certain Jews who opposed Jesus' teachings and does not mean all Jews.

"It is ironic that a church named 'Lovingway' would advance such an attitude of hurtfulness," Ryan said. "Christ gave his life for all people. To blame a particular group of people, then or now, is a misuse of the Gospel of love and grace. The Colorado Council of Churches wishes to make it clear that this one congregation does not speak for the vast majority of the Christian community. In fact, we stand in direct opposition to the message on this sign and its implications."

"We also call upon the leaders of other Christian groups in Denver to reaffirm the statements they have made: that all of mankind shares responsibility for Jesus' death, and that blame should not be placed collectively on the Jews of the time or the Jews of today," DeBoskey said. "We fervently hope that Jews and Christians can use this time as an opportunity for dialogue and learning, not blame and divisiveness."

Gibson's film has been criticized because it depicts the Roman governor Pontius Pilate as reluctant to crucify Jesus, placing the blame more on the Jewish high priest Caiaphas. Some people fear that the extreme violence and brutality inflicted on Jesus in the movie

**THE PASSION OF THE CHRIST**



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could foster unwarranted resentment toward Jews.

The \$25 million movie, although intense and graphically violent, is being praised by Christian leaders for bringing the Passion story to a large national audience.

Gibson financed the movie by himself because no Hollywood studio was willing to invest. Gibson, a devout Catholic, belongs to a traditionalist sect that rejects Vatican II changes in 1965 as too liberal, changes that include a law that condemned the medieval thinking that Jews were cursed by God.

That so-called "blood libel" is in the Gospel according to Matthew, when Caiaphas says, "His blood be on us and our children," for allowing the crucifixion to happen.

Gibson says his movie is not anti-Semitic. The movie is rated R and presented with English subtitles.

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