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Series E: General Alphabetical Files. 1960-1992

Box 87, Folder 5, "Passover Plot", 1976.



RELIGIOUS NEWS SERVICE

FOREIGN SERVICE

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TUESDAY, MAY 11, 1976

FILM BASED ON 'THE PASSOVER PLOT'
GENERATES CONTROVERSY IN ISRAEL

By Religious News Service (5-11-76)

JERUSALEM (RNS) -- "This is not a film about Jesus Christ," insists Wolf Schmidt, producer of a movie version of The Passover Plot. "It's a film about...a Jew fighting the Roman occupation."

Whatever the producer claims, the film, based on the 1965 book by British scholar Hugh Schonfield, has generated controversy while being shot in Israel. It is scheduled for a July 4 U.S. release.

A group of Jerusalem clergy called the film a "direct attack of Jesus Christ...in such a way as to destroy the whole basis of the Christian faith." They urged Israel to ban the filming.

The Lutheran Church of the Redeemer here, where trial scenes were to be filmed, refused permission.

Dr. Schonfield depicts Jesus as ordering the betrayal by Judas. According to the story, Jesus could not have died in the time spent on the cross. Rather, drugged to appear dead, Jesus would then pretend to have risen. Dr. Schonfield says the unplanned thrust from the Roman soldier's lance spoiled the scheme.

In the film, Jesus is an angry revolutionary with a keen sense of politics. The language is contemporary. ("We gotta get outa here," Judas tells Jesus at one point.) The disciples sometimes seem to be public-relations men, building up the non-miraculous and accidental so they seem to be something else.

New York actor Zalman King plays Jesus.

Mr. Schmidt claims the film is not an attack on Christianity. "It is simply another theory, a different point of view based on sources other than the Gospels."

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[Handwritten signature]
Passover Plot

May 28, 1976

(Dictated)

Father Paul H. Hallett, Contributing Editor
THE REGISTER
934-950 Barnock Street
P.O. Box 1620
Denver, Colorado, 80204

Dear Father Hallett,

Thank you for your recent letter regarding "The Passover Plot."

I very much share the concern about the possibilities of a film which may defame the basic doctrine of Christianity and will want to do everything I can as a matter of fairness and justice to assure that it does not succeed in communicating hostility against the faith which so many of my Christian friends hold precious.

I have asked our office in Jerusalem to try to obtain a copy of the script of the film. Obviously, I cannot make any judgment about its contents until I have had a chance to see the document. Beyond that, there is always the imponderable of how a film is treated cinematically in terms of caricatures, costume, etc.

I simply want you to know that I stand in solidarity with you against any portrayal of anyone's faith commitments which represent an unfair and unjust defamation of that which one stakes one's whole being on.

As soon as I have further information, I will be glad to communicate it to you.

With warmest personal good wishes, I am,

Faithfully yours,

Rabbi Marc H. Tanenbaum
National Director
Interreligious Affairs

MHT:RPR