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*Preserving American Jewish History*

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Box 29, Folder 10, *Jesus Christ Superstar*, 1973.

AJC AND "JESUS CHRIST SUPERSTAR"

A Chronology of Events

Directions for Use

1. This is not a finished report but a collection of raw data, for use in writing statements, releases or other documents, and in answering questions.
2. The information herein is tagged with its sources, which are: the Public Education and Interpretation Department's correspondence files for 1971, 1972 and 1973 (key letters A, B, C); selected documents from the Interreligious Affairs Department's files for 1972 and 1973 (E, F); and selected documents from Frances Rosenberg's file for 1973 (G). Files of the original documents used here, or duplicates thereof, are available in Mort Yarmon's office. Each of these files contains abstracts of relevant items for quick reference (on half-size sheets).
3. Newspaper coverage is only sporadically reflected here. In many cases, it will be desirable to go to the PEI Department's clipping files or the Clippings Department for fuller information.
4. For reactions from Church and Black quarters in the summer of 1973, also consult Gerald Strober's special report of July 31, "Preliminary Survey of Responses to 'Jesus Christ Superstar.'"
5. The material has not been screened for publication. Much of it is confidential; much may be impolitic to publish. Before anything based on this chronology is made public, it will have to be cleared.
6. In many instances, gaps and loose ends remain, or facts still need to be fully verified before they can be published. Any such instances are indicated by queries TYPED IN CAPITAL LETTERS.

Compiled by George Salomon  
July 31, 1973

"After losing my original family to Nazis and Communists...I feel shocked, aggrieved and crushed, emotionally and physically, at any possibility of new waves of anti-Semitism, due to inflammation of the naive, vicious and primitive by the movie [Jesus Christ Superstar]!

"I beg you, Sirs, please...collect petitions, write letters yourselves, organize protest marchers, engage decent Christians, all to save my children and yours!"

--Letter from Mrs. E.S., Brooklyn, N.Y.,  
to the American Jewish Committee  
June 24, 1973 (F-5)

The current Universal Pictures film Jesus Christ Superstar and its predecessor, the stage play of the same name, ~~by Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice~~ have been in the forefront of public attention for some time because of questions they raise in the field of intergroup relations--between Christians and Jews, and between Whites and Blacks as well. As an intergroup relations agency, the American Jewish Committee has made it its business to alert and sensitize the public to these issues, supplying relevant background information and seeking to forestall damage which the play or the film might inadvertently do. What follows is a record of AJC efforts in this area over the last two years.

#### The Passion Play Tradition

Dramatic spectacles representing the Passion and death of Jesus, such as the traditional Passion plays of European communities and their latter-day analogues, have long played a baneful role in the life of Jewish communities. In such performances, Jewish individuals and the Jewish authorities whom Jesus confronted in his time have almost always been cast as uniformly deep-dyed villains--a portrayal prompted more by dramaturgic considerations than by the facts of Jesus' life as recorded in the Gospels.

The Gospel record, while written in part from a polemical Christian standpoint and capable of misinterpretation, makes clear that Jesus, though examined by certain Jewish authorities in Jerusalem, was sentenced to death by the representative of the Roman occupying power, Pontius Pilate, and put to death by his order. The Gospel nowhere states or implies that the entire Jewish people of the world or even of Palestine was involved, nor that Jewry's sufferings in subsequent history had anything to do with this supposed involvement. Yet popular Passion plays, such as the notorious spectacle performed every ten years at Oberammergau in West Germany, have traditionally implied that such was the case. In doing so, they have lent sanction to anti-Jewish sentiments and contributed materially to the ideology that has led to persecutions of Jews in nearly every century of Western civilization.

Since the Hitler era showed where this ideology can lead, organized Christianity has made great strides in discarding it. The Roman Catholic Church adopted a dramatically new, friendly policy toward Jews and Judaism at the Second Vatican Council in 1965; some Protestant bodies had taken comparable steps even earlier, and others subsequently followed suit. But changes in official Church policy are not always instantaneously translated into popular art. Therefore, the American Jewish Committee has found it necessary to continue keeping watch over Passion plays and similar works. Jesus Christ Superstar, appearing in 1971 as a rendering of Jesus' life in a modern youth-culture rock idiom, appeared to warrant attention as a new specimen of the genre.

The "Rock Opera" on Stage

Written by two young Englishmen, Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice, the Superstar musical was heard in concert form in many American cities during 1971. A record album sold in the millions. When a stage performance in New York, to be directed by Tom O'Horgan, was announced that year, AJC decided to take a close look at the work. AJC representatives, among them the agency's consultant on interreligious education, a Presbyterian scholar named Gerald S. Strober, attended two of the previews. In addition, Mr. Strober meticulously analyzed the libretto as it appeared in the printed edition of the play (published by Leeds Music Corporation, London, 1970). The result was a 10-page report entitled Jesus Christ Superstar: The Rock Opera and Christian-Jewish Relations by Mr. Strober, with a foreword by Rabbi Marc H. Tanenbaum, AJC's National Director of Interreligious Affairs (A-1). In the moves that followed later that year, the Strober report was the central exhibit.

The analysis made it all too plain that Jesus Christ Superstar, for all its contemporary trappings, fell into many of the accustomed pitfalls of Passion plays. True, it did not, as Strober put it, "repeat the myth of the Jews as Christ killers condemned by God for all time," or "claim that all Jews of Jesus' time knew him and forsook him." But it caricatured the Jewish priests who confronted Jesus as hideously inhuman, bloodthirsty conspirators or childish fools, solely and collectively responsible for Jesus' death; it taxed them, contrary to scriptural authorities, with concerted and brutally beating Jesus; it implied without quite saying so that, contrary to the Gospel record, the priesthood was

responsible for the execution of John the Baptist.

On the other hand, the analysis noted, the Roman governor, Pilate, who tried Jesus and ordered his execution, was turned from the brutally oppressive colonial official known to history into a well-meaning, rather weak man who would have saved Jesus but for the priests' unrelenting pressure. Judas (played by a Black man!) was cast, in a role inflated far beyond the Gospel record, as a victim of the Jewish priests' treachery. Most important, the play left unclear who actually executed Jesus.

For these and other reasons, the analysis concluded that the play and its Broadway presentation were "less than fair in depicting the role of Jewish individuals and institutions in the Passion of Jesus," often making these individuals appear more sinister than the Gospel record warranted, and juxtaposing heroes and villains in a simplistic way. Superstar, the report concluded, "is, if nothing else, insufficiently thoughtful, potentially mischievous and possibly a backward step on the road toward improved Christian-Jewish relations."

#### Taking the Case to the Public

As the opening date of the Broadway show, October 12, drew near, the American Jewish Committee sought to reach the producer, Robert Stigwood, for discussion of these concerns, but was unable to do so (A-3). Thus, while public attention mounted (The New York Times, on October 10, listed six benefit performances scheduled for October alone (A-6)), AJC was left with no alternative but to take its case to the public.

A news release summarizing the contents of the Strober report was distributed to New York newspapers, to the general and specialized news services and a variety of individual publications (see clipping file). Outside New York, AJC's chapter and regional offices took up contact with local media; in addition, local community relations councils were reached (A-7). The report was also sent to film critics of weeklies, dailies and the mass media at this time--a move criticized by some of the recipients, which was explained by AJC as not an effort to censor the play but to create awareness of possibly unnoticed implications. Censorship "is the last thing we have in mind," Rabbi Tanenbaum was quoted as saying (clipping: N.Y. Times 10/13/71).

On October 13, important stories reflecting AJC's misgivings ran in The New York Times, the New York Daily News and the Long Island paper, Newsday (A-11a, b; A-15A). On October 31, the Times again mentioned AJC's views in an interview with the authors of the play (A-15A), and on (DATE) the Times' Sunday art section featured a long article by the noted Episcopal writer and campus lecturer, Malcolm Boyd, which noted the Christian-Jewish aspects of the play as well as the aesthetic and theological problems of its portrayal of Jesus. "The Jews seem to be guilty, once again of causing Jesus' death," Mr. Boyd wrote; "Jewish priests are seen in ominous, gargoyle-like costumes straight out of medieval caricatures" (FROM MANUSCRIPT; SEE IF SO PUBLISHED) (A-16, A-30).

Meanwhile, picked up by agencies like Associated Press, United Press International, Reuters, Religious News Service and National Catholic News Service, the substance of AJC's analysis was read

by audiences coast to coast. A mention of the issue appeared in Jack O'Brian's syndicated column among others (A-15A; clipping file). On October 25, Time did a cover story and Newsday a major story on Superstar; both prominently referred to AJC's views (A-15A). In the Jewish press, coverage was massive, thanks mainly to a story syndicated by the Jewish Telegraphic Agency (clipping file).

Interviews with Rabbi Tanenbaum or Mr. Strober were aired by numerous TV and radio stations, including WNBC-TV News and WCBS-TV. References to AJC figured in many other broadcasts, including the CBS "World of Religion" program and NBC's "Monitor" (A-15A).

Among numerous (TRUE?) spontaneous responses to the publicity, an unsolicited offer of help in Catholic school came from the Reverend C. Albert Koob, Director of the National Catholic Education Association (A-24). (OTHER SUCH RESPONSES? ACTIVITIES DIRECTED TO CHRISTIAN GROUPS?)

#### From Stage to Screen

Even before the opening of the New York show, it became known that Jesus Christ Superstar would eventually become a film. In mid-September, Allen Rivkin, the Director of the Jewish Film Advisory Committee in Los Angeles--an agency supported by the major national Jewish organization--learned that Universal Pictures, Inc., was planning such a movie, and that Norman Jewison, the creator of the successful Fiddler on the Roof picture, would direct and produce it. The film would be made in Israel, it was also learned (A-4).

What this clearly meant was that the objectionable aspects of the current stage Superstar might well turn up again in the

projected screen Superstar with its vastly greater potential audience. Mr. Rivkin was hoping to see the shooting script, but it was not clear when such a script might be made. In any case, the film reportedly was to use no dialogue but to rely on the lyrics to convey the message (A-19), so that the problems, if any, seemed likely to appear in already fixed elements or in the costuming or staging.

### Israel's Role

The choice of Israel as the filming location gave hope that it would be possible to keep elements offensive to Jews out of the film. According to Mr. Rivkin, the making of the film was to be closely supervised by the cinema division of the Israeli Government. Initially, the then Israeli Consul General in Los Angeles, Yeheskel Carmel, was expected to have a role in this procedure (A-4); later, it was reportedly decided to handle any evaluating function in Jerusalem (A-19).

Following further checking, Rivkin stated on October 8 that, while the Israeli Government insisted on inspecting scripts of films to be made in Israel only where Government financing was involved, Universal had voluntarily submitted a script for another film, The Antagonists, that entailed no co-financing arrangements (A-19).

AJC, realizing that Jesus Christ Superstar might warrant more than cursory, economically oriented attention from the Israeli Government, promptly alerted Zvi Brosh, Israeli Minister of Information, transmitting a copy of the Strober analysis and requesting an opportunity for discussion (A-14).

Approaches to the Film Producers

Simultaneously, at the earliest possible moment, AJC embarked on a concerted effort to make its views heard by those responsible for the film. On October 8, before the Strober report was publicly released, copies were sent to AJC's Los Angeles area director for transmittal to Lew R. Wasserman, president of Universal Pictures' parent corporation, MCA, Inc., and to Taft Schreiber, a high-ranking official at Universal (A-2). The same day, copies went to Mr. Rivkin with a request for guidance as to who on director Jewison's staff should see the analysis (A-5). Rivkin subsequently sent an additional copy to Universal Pictures (A-19).

On October 29, Rivkin reported having been assured that the copy transmitted by AJC had reached Mr. Wasserman, though it could not be ascertained whether the latter had read it (A-26). As to possible recipients on the director's staff, Mr. Rivkin expressed confidence that Mr. Jewison himself would see it before starting the shooting, which was not to begin until August 1972 (A-26). In the days that followed, Mr. Rivkin volunteered to meet with Mr. Jewison (A-27), and AJC's Los Angeles Area director/<sup>reported</sup> that Jewison had received a copy (A-29).

At the same time, it was learned that the script for the film was being prepared in London, where Mr. Jewison lived; it would not reach Los Angeles until April. Since it would by then be too late for discussing basic matters, AJC decided to contact Mr. Jewison himself as soon as possible and suggest that he meet with Mr. Strober.

Discussion with Norman Jewison

Mr. Jewison was reached by telephone on November 12, in Toronto,

by the AJC Public Information Director, Morton Yarmon. In a manner which Mr. Yarmon later described as "antagonistic from the start," Mr. Jewison said he found any charges of anti-Semitism in the play invalid; he had seen it, he said, in the company of several Israeli generals and of Chaim Topol (the star of his Fiddler on the Roof film), and none of them had taken offense. Mr. Jewison added that he did not wish to be involved in any discussion about the matter. Though he acknowledged having read some news clippings about concern in Jewish circles, he asserted that he had not seen the Strober analysis. Distancing himself from the Broadway production, he concluded with a declaration that his film would offend no one, "religiously or ethnically" (A-32).

Following up the phone conversation, Mr. Yarmon sent Mr. Jewison a copy of the Strober analysis, with a letter expressing appreciation of the intent to let the film offend no one (A-33). However, feeling that the exchange had been unsatisfactory, AJC decided to attempt no further direct dealings with Mr. Jewison (A-32). The next move seemed to be up to the Israelis.

Meanwhile, the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith was showing increasing signs of concern, along much the same lines as AJC. True, Dore Schary, the noted onetime M-G-M executive, who is (TITLE) of ADL as well as chairman of the Jewish Film Advisory Committee, did not think it politic during early 1972 to intercede with the producers of the film--a view shared by Martin Gang, (TITLE) of the Jewish Film Advisory Committee and a member of AJC's Board of Governors. However, ADL's Los Angeles representative, Milton A. Senn, prepared a critique of Superstar including a set

of suggested modifications, which was sent to Mr. Jewison early in April (B-5, E-2), while he was in Los Angeles to attend the Academy Awards, having been nominated for his Fiddler on the Roof (B-2). A copy also went to MCA, Inc. (B-5). Mr. Jewison responded a few weeks later in a letter (on his behalf written) by David A. Lipton, a Universal Pictures executive, to Mr. Rivkin, stating that Mr. Jewison would get back to Mr. Rivkin about the matter (B-9).

By this time, Mr. Jewison had returned to London. Since the script had presumably been completed and casting was about to begin, there clearly was no time to be lost in taking up possible issues with him. It was felt that an attempt should be made to reach him in London, possibly through William Frankel, editor of the London Jewish Chronicle (B-7). On May 10, however, Mr. Jewison wrote a reassuring letter to Mr. Rivkin from England, responding both to the ADL critique and to the Strober analysis sent to him earlier by AJC.

"Nothing Offensive"

In his letter, Mr. Jewison stated he would "certainly take, under advisement, the specific suggestions mentioned on page 8 [of the ADL paper] and the other areas that seem to offend both organizations." [Punctuation as in original.] He added; "I believe discrimination, in any form, to be an evil...I would hope that the film version of 'JCS' will, in its final form, not be found offensive, blasphemous or distasteful by any religious group." While disliking censorship and pressure groups, Mr. Jewison said, he understood ADL's and Mr. Rivkin's position. He pointed out that his Fiddler on the Roof had received the 1971 Interreligious Award

--a circumstance he characterized as "ironic"--and expressed the hope that Superstar would achieve the same high level. In conclusion he stated that he would contact Mr. Rivkin if he returned to Los Angeles in the near future (B-8).

In his acknowledgment, Mr. Rivkin assured Mr. Jewison that no one questioned his goodwill, but stressed the sensitivity of the matter. He added that he would be glad to meet with Mr. Jewison in London if that were more convenient than Los Angeles (B-11).

On June 5, referring to this correspondence, Mr. Schary gave an optimistic appraisal of the situation. At a meeting of the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council's Jewish Broadcasting and Film Committee, of which he was and is Chairman, he expressed the hope that necessary changes would be made in the final script and voiced confidence in Mr. Jewison's taste and judgment (B-24). In any case, he added, the Israelis would see to it that the film was not objectionable (B-18). For the moment, he concluded, he saw no need for additional steps (B-24).

AJC took a less sanguine view at the meeting. Mr. Yarmon recalled his own unsatisfactory phone conversation with Mr. Jewison six months earlier and urged that Mr. Rivkin continue to press for modifications. Another AJC representative pointed to the possibility that the staging and costuming, as well as the lyrics, might contain offensive elements. Mr. Schary felt, however, that Mr. Jewison's reactions might simply be reflective of the multiple pressures from Jewish organizations. As for the costuming, he foresaw no problems, although he did not think the lyrics would be changed (B-24).

On the Israeli Scene

During the early part of 1972, arrangements were made for the shooting of the film in Israel. On (VERIFY DATE), Mr. Jewison said in an interview in Variety that he had received full permission from the Government of Israel for the making of the film, which he said would be a "modern Passion play" (B-2). On the face of it, this report conflicted with information initially received by AJC from Minister of Information Zvi Brosh, to the effect that no permission was required or had been applied for. As for the tenor of the film, Mr. Brosh expected it to differ substantially from that of the play (B-3)--an impression confirmed by a news release from Universal Pictures, dated April 17, which announced that the filming would begin on August 10 and said the film would be "completely different from any concert or theatrical presentation of Superstar" (B-4).

Mr. Brosh subsequently stated to AJC, early in April, that Israel would derive substantial financial benefit from the making of the film and would be in a position to exact certain conditions. Mr. Jewison was to submit a script to Israeli authorities in May. Mr. Brosh further revealed that Chaim Topol, the star of Fiddler, had served as intermediary, and that, contrary to statements by Mr. Jewison, had found the stage version of Superstar far from inoffensive; actually he had been much concerned about it and had so informed Mr. Jewison in private. Finally, Mr. Brosh said that Consul General Carmel in Los Angeles would meet with Mr. Schreiber of MCA to discuss possible changes in the script (E-3). In connection with that discussion, ADL's Milton A. Senn on April 21 sent

Mr. Carmel various documents and a copy of a communication from Mr. Schreiber (B-6). (WHAT DID IT SAY? WAS THE MEETING HELD?)

About this time, public opinion in Israel was becoming preoccupied with the film, and some critical opinions of the venture were crystallizing. Several articles in the Tel Aviv daily, Ha'aretz, made a considerable impact. On May 22, a number of questions on the subject were asked in the Knesset (the Israeli Parliament) of Haim Bar-Lev, the Minister of Commerce and Industry, whose jurisdiction included the making of films.

It was asked, first, whether the Israeli Film Center, as recently reported in the Israeli press, had approved the filming of Jesus Christ Superstar in Israel, with the understanding that Jews would not be represented in a repugnant manner, as they were in the play. The Minister answered that no government approval was required simply for coming to Israel to make films. Universal Pictures was not producing the film as an Israeli film in the legal sense, he said, hence no authorization was needed.

Asked whether the Government would provide financial incentives for Superstar, Mr. Bar-Lev pointed out that subsidies were given only to Israeli films; the only aids to foreign film producers were an "indirect return" of taxes paid on foreign currency they brought in.

When asked further whether Israel should not refrain from supporting, even in this indirect way, a work that might have anti-Semitic undertones, the Minister replied that Superstar was yet to be made, and that Mr. Jewison's past record suggested the reverse of anti-Semitism. Mr. Jewison, he elaborated, had asked for no financial benefits; like any foreign producer, he would simply get the normal tax refund (B-26).

Conflicting Expectations

During June and July, expectations and indications in Israel concerning the tenor of the film remained contradictory. In early June, Mr. Schary stated that Mayor Teddy Kollek of Jerusalem wanted American Jewish organizations to stop complaining about the filming; "everything would be OK" (B-22). A cautiously optimistic forecast appeared on July 19 in The Jerusalem Post, in an article by Geoffrey Wigoder. Headlined "Superstar--'Less Than Fair' to the Jews" (the phrase "less than fair" was borrowed from the summary of the Strober report), the article detailed the undesirable aspects of the play at length, in terms of the Strober analysis, but foresaw that these nuances would be eliminated, because the film would seek not to offend Jewish viewers, and because Israeli authorities would review the script. While acknowledging the existence of pitfalls, Wigoder also noted the "uncanny empathy" for Jews which, he said, Jewison had shown in Fiddler on the Roof (B-25).

AJC was less sanguine, in the presence of indications (WHAT WERE THEY?) that the movie would be almost entirely based on the script of the stage play. On June 7, Rabbi Tanenbaum, AJC's Inter-religious Affairs Director, noted this prospect in a letter to former Ambassador Arthur Lourie, political advisor to the Israeli Foreign Minister, Abba Eban, and warned emphatically of probable controversy over the portrayal of the Jewish priests and the Jewish "mob" unless modified. Not only would there be conflict within the Jewish community, Rabbi Tanenbaum said; anti-Semites would charge Jews with hypocrisy because they frequently attacked Passion plays, yet permitted a Passion play film to be shot in Israel when

there was money to be made. He referred to AJC's contacts with Mr. Jewison, who, he said, had been "hostile and cagey" and had not indicated whether he would deal forthrightly with the issue of anti-Semitism. Noting that Israeli authorities might have some influence on the course of events, Rabbi Tanenbaum concluded with an urgent request to help insure that Israel not become "a center for export of theological anti-Semitism" (B-19).

Ambassador Lourie replied on June 14 that both the Foreign and the Commerce and Industry Ministries were alert to the issue, and that he was sending on AJC's documentary materials to both. A question on the subject was on the Knesset's agenda for early consideration, he added (B-20). (ACTUALLY, THIS HAD ALREADY BEEN ASKED ON MAY 22--SEE ABOVE.)

(CHECK RESNIKOFF'S MONTHLY REPORT CA. SEPT. 1972 (HELEN DIRECTOR) RE UNSUCCESSFUL APPROACH TO FOREIGN OFFICE.)

In a letter to Zeev Birger, the director of the Commerce and Industry Ministry's Film Center, written on July 7, AJC's representative in Jerusalem, M. Bernard Resnikoff, again raised the question of Israeli Government support for the filming of Superstar. Transmitting the Strober analysis, he said he had alerted the Foreign Office's Department of Church Relations to possible repercussions in the United States and elsewhere (E-4) (WAS ANY ANSWER RECEIVED FROM BIRGER?)

#### New Assurances

Shortly after the shooting of the film began in Jerusalem on August 20 (B-23), an article in The Jerusalem Post Magazine ("Norman Jewison and Superstar," by Pearl Sheffy Geffen, September 1) quoted

Mr. Jewison as saying: "This is a modern work...not pretending to be biblically or historically correct." He added that the work could hardly be anti-Semitic "when everyone in the film is Jewish, outside of Pilate and a few Roman soldiers." Criticism, he claimed, had come mainly from secular Jewish quarters in New York; the Jewish community in London, he said, had voiced no objection. "Here in Israel," he further asserted, "we have been over the script with the government authorities concerned, and we don't find anything that is going to be upsetting" (B-27). (DO WE HAVE ANY DOCUMENTATION WHETHER OR NOT THE SCRIPT WAS ACTUALLY REVIEWED BY THE GOVT?)

On September 20, these and other angles of the filming became the subject of a story by Joseph Lapid in Variety, the entertainment trade paper, headlined "Jewison Assures Israeli Authorities on Religioso 'Care' in 'Superstar.'" The article noted that making a film about Jesus was a "ticklish affair" in Israel because of the attitudes of the Orthodox population; it also recalled the questions asked by the opposition in the Knesset. Despite the official denials, Lapid asserted, the film was getting Government aid through a rebate on dollars invested in Israel and through various practical helps from the Government-sponsored Israeli Film Centre (B-30).

The authorities had worried about the reservations on the part of American Jewry, Lapid reported, but Jewison had checked ADL's suggestions against the script and had found no changes necessary. According to the article, Jewison had told Minister Bar-Lev that he had "nothing to worry about anything anti-Semitic being filmed in Jerusalem"; Bar-Lev had countered that he trusted Mr. Jewison because of his handling of Fiddler on the Roof (B-30).

Late in September, Arthur N. Greenberg, (TITLE) of AJC, informed AJC President Philip E. Hoffman that he had seen Mr. Jewison in Israel and listened to his reaction over what was called the "flap" concerning both the stage show and the film. (FOR DETAILS SEE RESNIKOFF'S MONTHLY REPORT--H. DIRECTOR.) Mr. Jewison himself, said Mr. Greenberg, disliked some aspects of the play and would not repeat them in the film (B-31). "Offensive material" reportedly had been removed and unclear parts clarified. The impression given was the while Mr. Jewison was not happy about AJC's overtures to him, he had in some measure responded to them (B-32).

#### The Truth About the Picture

The film Jesus Christ Superstar opened in several cities in late June 1973, with other openings scheduled for July and August; the New York opening was set for August 8. Previews were held in New York during June. One of these was attended by American Jewish Committee staff members on June 8, and on June 14 AJC released an analysis of the film, again by Gerald S. Strober.

The moving picture, it turned out, closely followed the stage play; contrary to the various assurances by its makers, nearly everything that had been objectionable in the original libretto had been left standing. Indeed, some of the negative imagery had been heightened. Thus, in the scene portraying the cleansing of the Temple, the money changers of the Gospel were turned into bizarre, subhuman drug pushers, prostitutes and sellers of machine guns--"the most striking example of the way in which the film caricatures persons and groups who do not follow Jesus or who oppose him," according to Strober. Judas, again a Black man, was represented

pointedly as a victim of Jewish perfidy: A Jewish priest holds out a bag of money for him to take, but as he reaches for it, the priest drops it to the ground with a contemptuous smirk.

In the sequence representing Judas' guilt and despair after betraying Jesus, he is shown fleeing into the desert where, incongruously, tanks and low-flying military aircraft threateningly bear down on him. The military equipment, Strober said, might have been meant to represent Roman might, the power of the Jewish authorities, or perhaps Judas' own conscience, but they also seemed likely to suggest a caricature of the supposed "ruthless power" of modern Israel.

Perhaps most serious, where the play had placed the responsibility for Jesus' death squarely on the Jewish priesthood, the later parts of the film laid it to "the Jews" as a group, thereby giving new currency to one of the oldest and most baneful anti-Semitic ideas. For this reason and others, Strober judged the film as "nothing less than a catastrophe" in interreligious relations. Rabbi Tanenbaum, in a foreword, called it "a singularly damaging setback in the struggle against the religious sources of anti-Semitism," and regretted its having been made in Israel, which, he said, might undercut Jewish efforts against Passion spectacles containing anti-Jewish elements.

#### In Print and on the Air

Until actually seeing the film, AJC had carefully kept its concern about its contents out of the public eye. But now, struck with the potential harmfulness of a "G"-rated film that might be seen by millions, AJC immediately released the gist of its analysis

to the press, the wire services, radio and TV, and urged its own area offices and community relations councils across the nation to make contact with local news media and religious leaders (F-10, C-3). In the days that followed, the full Strober report was sent to religious editors (C-8a, b; F-8) and other key news people (C-8a, b, c; F-7, F-8, F-9, F-11).

During late June and early July, among many other press reactions, The New York Times summarized the Strober analysis (clipping file, June 24); UPI syndicated a story about it, with the terms "catastrophe" and "damaging setback" in the lead (F-4); Louis Cassels of UPI wrote a blistering column about it (C-8c, C-12); George Cornell of AP presented both sides of the issue, giving much space to the Strober report; the Detroit Free Press on June 30 ran an article that was largely critical of the film (C-30). Malcolm Boyd said on July 15 in a long article in Newsday, the Long Island paper, that the film "equates Jewishness with villainy" and would make "Jew-haters...rub their hands with glee." Scenes involving the Black Judas, he added, "will be instantly understood in South Africa" (C-23; clipping in Selma Hirsh's file).

(FOR OTHER CITATIONS, SEE GERALD STROBER'S JULY 31 REPORT, SECTIONS ON "BLACK REACTION" AND "OTHER COMMENTS," PP. 11-13A.)

On the air, Rabbi A. James Rudin of AJC was heard over some 40 Black radio stations scoring Superstar as anti-Jewish, anti-Black, and likely to stir Black-Jewish antagonism. "Blacks and Jews cannot stand idly by while their dignity and integrity are maligned," he declared (G-6). Rabbi Tanenbaum appeared in an interview on June 28 on WABC-TV's "A.M. New York" show (G-3),

Mr. Strober on (DATE OF BROADCAST?) on the "Message of Israel" program (RADIO OR TV?) (G-4). In July, Ernest Weiner, AJC's San Francisco area director, was interviewed for the CBS network program "World of Religion" (F-19). (ADD OTHER BROADCASTS; CF. G-7.)

Contrary to the procedure followed when the stage Superstar opened in 1971, AJC's analysis was not sent to critics ahead of the film's opening date, although the document was offered to those who might want it (C-7). Not until July 23 were unsolicited copies sent to film critics (C-40).

#### In the Jewish Community

Throughout, AJC worked intensively with other Jewish organizations and Jewish media. On June 15, the Jewish Broadcasting and Film Committee of the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council held a special meeting on the subject, at which AJC took the lead. At this session, it was reported that Jewish reactions to the film, East and West, were uniformly negative. In Los Angeles, Mr. Rivkin of the Jewish Film Advisory Committee had called it "the worst ever" in terms of Christian-Jewish relations, it was reported. The meeting thereupon decided to make the Strober analysis the basis of an official statement by NJCRAC, to be submitted for ratification at an impending plenary session of NJCRAC (C-5).

When thus adopted the following week, the statement was widely noted in the press. The New York Times gave it considerable space (clipping June 24). NJCRAC urged its member organizations to disseminate it to local film critics and religion editors, churches and the Black community (C-13a). It was also circulated to their own constituencies by such groups as the National Council on Jewish

Audio-Visual Materials (C-13c) and the New York Board of Rabbis (F-21). On July 10, NJCRAC reported to its members that--undoubtedly thanks in part to efforts like these--local reviews and other reactions to Superstar, while predominantly favorable, were now frequently reflecting Jewish concerns over the film. In a number of cases, initial coverage had been followed by additional references making this point (C-28).

Jewish newspapers by and large agreed with AJC and NJCRAC on the seriousness of the Superstar issue. In a few instances where such papers had, according to AHC's view, taken the matter too lightly, contact was made in order to get a hearing for an alternate evaluation (F-18, C-31).

(FOR EXAMPLES OF JEWISH PRESS REACTION, SEE GERALD STROBER'S JULY 31 REPORT, SECTION ON "JEWISH REACTIONS," PP. 8-11.)

#### Reaching Christian Leaders

Contacts with Christian leaders, educators and newsmen formed an important part of AJC's efforts to bring the intergroup issues of Superstar before the public.

The National Catholic Education Association voiced a sympathetic reaction; its president, the Reverend C. Albert Koob, informed AJC that he would take up the matter in his organization's newsletter for teachers and school administrators (F-19, C-25). The Reverend Owen F. Campion, editor of The Tennessee Register, a Catholic newspaper published in Nashville, prepared an article in which the Strober analysis was cited at length; also, he encouraged AJC to contact Catholic education officials in his community (C-18). The

Reverend Robert F. Drinan, S. J., Member of Congress from Massachusetts, issued a statement entitled "'Jesus Christ Superstar' Debases Judaism and Christianity" (per Gerald Strober).

On the Protestant side, word was received from the Methodist Bishop of New York, Ralph Ward; the President of a major Protestant theological seminary in Ohio; and the President of the Richmond Clergy Association, who had written to the 600 members of his group (F-19). The Broadcasting and Film Commission of the National Council of Churches invited Rabbi Tanenbaum to write one of three articles on Superstar for its Film Information bulletin. Rabbi Tanenbaum's review, printed in the July-August issue alongside a favorable and a middling one, characterized the film as "a witches' brew of anti-Black and anti-Semitic venom."

In summarizing the public response, a July 23 report by NJCRAC stated that the religious press was divided fifty-fifty for and against Superstar, but that all reports had noted (though not necessarily agreed with) Jewish concerns. Major Christian leaders had refrained from endorsing the film, it was noted, and some had come out against it (C-42).

(FOR FURTHER DETAILS AND EXAMPLES, SEE GERALD STROBER'S JULY 31 REPORT, SECTION ON "CHRISTIAN REACTIONS," PP. 1-8; ALSO PP. 14-15.)

#### Freedom-of-Speech Aspects

While committed to its role in bringing important intergroup issues before the public, AJC has always been opposed to censorship or anything that might smack of it. Similarly, distaste for censorship and undue pressure was strongly in evidence at the June 15 session of the Jewish Broadcasting and Film Committee of NJCRAC,

where AJC submitted the Strober report. The meeting decided unanimously to refrain from such moves as asking film distributors not to exhibit Superstar (C-5). Subsequent opinion roundups by NJCRAC indicated that this decision had correctly gauged the mood of the Jewish community. As of late July, there had been virtually no calls for boycotts, demonstrations or pressures on theater owners. The attitude of the Jewish public toward the film was described as negative but not panicky; people felt the important thing was to sensitize the non-Jewish public, not to interfere with the showing of the film (C-42).

A more acceptable form of criticism, the distribution of literature setting forth AJC's views in theaters showing Superstar, was the subject of a consultation between AJC and Joseph Alterman, the Executive Director of the National Association of Theater Owners; but the chances for such a move were found to be slight, since exhibitors' contracts could be assumed to contain stringent controls of materials distributed (C-37, F-19).

In at least one instance, a film distributor--himself a Jew and concerned about the film's public-relations implications in his community--spontaneously turned to AJC for advice with respect to possible demonstrations or disruptions. He was encouraged to seek extra police patrol coverage, particularly during the first few days of the run (C-32). (DID DEMONSTRATIONS MATERIALIZE IN THIS INSTANCE?)

#### The Makers Defend the Film

While Superstar was playing to mixed notices, the makers of the film issued a number of statements in rebuttal of criticisms by AJC and others.

Universal Pictures was understandably heartened by Norman Jewison's having been chosen for the Annual Achievement Award of the California-Israel Chamber of Commerce for his contribution to the Israeli motion picture industry through the making of Superstar and another forthcoming film, Billy Two Hats. A news release from Universal noted that Dore Schary was an honorary committee member of the group and that at the ceremony, on July 1, Jack Valenti would head the list of speakers (C-2). However, the ceremony was boycotted by Yaakov Aviad, Mr. Carmel's successor as Consul General in Los Angeles (C-19) and by Zeev Birger of the Israeli Film Centre (per M. Yarmon).

During June, Mr. Jewison was interviewed by Warren Day of Ecu-Media for a broadcast that was to deal, among other things, with Jewish concern about Superstar. It was the only interview he would give to a religious source, Mr. Jewison said, since he did not want to spend the rest of his life defending the film. He rejected any accusation of scriptural or historical inaccuracy, on the grounds that he was not filming Matthew, Mark, Luke or John. He declared himself shocked by adverse Jewish reactions and reiterated that Chaim Topol and other Jewish friends had liked the stage version.

As for the Jewish priests in the film, Mr. Jewison said they stood symbolically for various religions, since no matter when Jesus might have come, he would have been crucified by "the Church." A song, "Then We Have Decided," was added, he said, to make the role of the priests less ambiguous than it had been in the Broadway show. When asked about the anti-Semitic potential of having Israelis in Israel enact the "Crucify him!" sequence, he reportedly

replied that the events had, after all, taken place in Israel, and the people involved had been Jews. He further pointed out that the Holy Land was holy to three faiths--that it was "our Holy Land," too, and that "they" needed to realize this (C-6).

Ecu-Media offered AJC time for presenting a contrary view (C-6), which was aired by Rabbi Tanenbaum on June 25 (per Frances Rosenberg).

A statement by Universal Pictures dated June 25 similarly asserted that the film was meant as a musical entertainment, not a religious tract. With due respect for AJC's concern, Universal said, "we do not believe their views to be supported by the content of the film version," or by the millions who had heard the music and seen the stage show (C-11). A news release by Universal, dated July 5, reiterated and amplified Mr. Jewison's reactions. Disregarding the numerous critical utterances of recent weeks, he maintained that no member of any audience of whatever age or background except AJC had ever complained about the film, and predicted that AJC's "inflammatory attack" would only help rebuild walls of mistrust. As for the casting (presumably in reference to the Black Judas), he said it was done solely on the basis of talent. The suggested association of planes and tanks in the film with Israeli military power was, he said, "a distortion of the truth" which he found "personally insulting and objectionable." In closing, he observed that his closeness to Israel and Jewish culture was attested to by his films, and pointed to the California-Israel Chamber of Commerce award given to him (C-22).

New Approaches to the Producers

While the makers of the film were thus stating their position, Mr. Rivkin, acting at AJC's request, on June 19 (VERIFY) sent the Strober analysis to Universal Pictures Vice President David A. Lipton (C-35). (DO WE KNOW THIS WAS ACTUALLY DONE?) On June 22, Leonard Yaseen, chairman of AJC's Interreligious Affairs Commission, telephoned Taft Schreiber at Universal, pointing out in extended discussion how Jews felt about the film, with reference to the Strober analysis (C-35).

On June 27, Elmer Winter, President of the American Jewish Committee, wrote to Lew R. Wasserman, the head of Universal Pictures' parent corporation, MCA, Inc., asking for a small, off-the-record meeting to share concerns about Superstar. (ADD: REFERENCE TO AJC BOARD OF GOVERNORS MEETING JUNE 26.) He mentioned that, with full understanding of the film's importance to Universal, "we do have a number of suggestions through which we believe some of the potentially damaging effects that we see in this film might possibly be mitigated" (C-15).

Mr. Winter's letter was answered, in Mr. Wasserman's absence, by Mr. Lipton, who declared himself "surprised and shocked" that a meeting was being requested now, instead of three weeks earlier, before the current "barrage of highly critical statements." Even though it might not have much point, however, Mr. Lipton said he would try to set up a meeting upon Mr. Wasserman's return late in July (F-14).

About the same time, Mr. Alterman of the National Association of Theater Owners agreed to try arranging a meeting between AJC

representatives and Henry H. Martin, the President of Universal Pictures, with a view to a later meeting with Mr. Wasserman (F-19). Mr. Martin turned down the suggestion (C-39) in a telephone conversation with Rabbi Tanenbaum on (SAME DATE AS WINTER'S CALL TO WASSERMAN--SEE BELOW), but indicated that AJC's points could be submitted to him in writing.

Rabbi Tanenbaum replied to Mr. Martin on July 19, acknowledging his invitation to state AJC's points, which he outlined as follows: (1) Recent anti-Semitic episodes in Italy, Argentina and elsewhere suggest caution in distributing the film in Italian, Spanish or, for that matter, German versions; (2) ways should be considered to prevent Arab governments from exploiting the film in appeals to Christian anti-Semitism; (3) in cutting the film for TV, special attention might be given to offensive passages; also, a prologue and epilogue might be added indicating that the film is not a historical or theological document, and possibly referring to the Second Vatican Council's rejection of the "Christ killer" idea; (4) in publicity and advertising, especially overseas, great discretion should be used to forestall exploitation by anti-Semites (C-39).

In the meantime, Mr. Winter, in response to Mr. Lipton's letter, had called Mr. Wasserman (GET DATE FROM MR. WINTER), who had flatly turned down the request for a meeting and again asked why AJC had delayed for three weeks before getting in touch with him. Mr. Winter retorted fully in a letter on July 31 (date from Winter's office), recalling the numerous occasions since October 1971 when AJC had tried to impress MCA, Universal Pictures or Mr. Jewison with its concerns, and pointing out that back in

May 1972 Mr. Jewison had agreed to take the Strober analysis under advisement. Thus, he stressed, there could be no question of unawareness on MCA's part or of bad faith on AJC's. He then went on to outline AJC's suggestions in much the same terms as Rabbi Tanenbaum had done in his letter to Mr. Martin (C-36, C-38).

(CHECK THIS SUMMARY AGAINST COPY OF WINTER LETTER WHEN RECEIVED.)

Israel: Who Is Responsible?

On June 7 (OR14?), Ha'aretz asserted in a front-page story that the film, made in Israel after assurances by Commerce and Industry Minister Bar-Lev, was anti-Semitic (F-1, C-35; VERIFY AGAINST ORIGINAL HEBREW CLIPPING, C-1). According to another Ha'aretz story (DATE?), the actors had been the first to indicate that this was the case (C-34). The weeks that followed saw a process of reexamination and reappraisal of Israel's role in the making of the film.

On June 21, AJC's Jerusalem representative, M. Bernard Resnikoff, reported that he had discussed the Strober analysis with two officials at the Israeli Foreign Office: Michael Pragai, a church relations specialist, and Michael Elitzur, a specialist for North America (VERIFY THIS FUNCTION). Both were impressed by the analysis and said they would have liked the foreword to be even sharper; both acknowledged that there had been insufficient sensitivity in Israel to events that affect Christian-Jewish relations elsewhere.

Mr. Pragai revealed that he had seen the script in the summer of 1972 and had been opposed to the making of the film in Israel even then, but had been overruled by another, unnamed ministry (C-10). The latter point was confirmed in a confidential communication from Raphael Rothstein, U.S. correspondent for Ha'aretz, to AJC;

the opposing official was there identified as Zeev Birger of the Israeli Film Centre, who reportedly had pushed for a quick start of the filming, lest the deal fall through (C-20). Similarly, Ken Bliss of World Wide Pictures, a Billy Graham affiliate, told AJC that in December 1972 Mr. Birger had told him he was not interested in the content of the film (C-37). (CAN WE REVEAL THESE COMMUNICATIONS?)

Rabbi Tanenbaum promptly cabled Mr. Pragai from New York, urging the Israeli Government to make clear that the film had no governmental approval of any kind. Silence at this point, he said, would militate against efforts to combat anti-Semitism in Passion plays anywhere (F-6).

On July 4, Variety ran an article claiming that showings of Superstar might be banned in Israel, though film censorship on ideological grounds was rare there. Variety also noted that allegations from abroad, concerning anti-Semitism in the film, threatened to prove embarrassing for Minister Bar-Lev, who had aided the making of the film on the strength of Mr. Jewison's assurances that it would not retain scenes offensive to Jewish circles (C-27).

On the same day, a spokesman of the Anti-Defamation League, while in Jerusalem, told to the Israeli press extended discussions had convinced him that the Government had given no implicit or explicit approval to the film. "Nobody should be fooled by assertions that Jesus Christ Superstar has any endorsement of any authoritative Israel source," the spokesman stated (C-21). But not until July 13 did the Government itself publicly distance itself from the film.

On that day, a statement by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, referring to recent press reports, pointed out that any film company may produce films in Israel; the law cannot prevent it, and the Government does not interfere in the content. Because of the delicacy of Superstar's subject matter, the Ministry nevertheless had asked the producer and the company to make sure the film contained nothing objectionable, such as traditional anti-Semitic stereotypes. Both the company and the director had given assurances to that effect, so that there was no evident reason for asking the company to leave Israel, not to mention the absence of a legal handle. Also, the film would have been made somewhere in any case. It would be "very distressing and most disappointing," the statement said, if the film should prove offensive in spite of the specific promises given. In any case, the makers were solely responsible for the content, it was stressed, and the film's having been made in Israel did not mean the Government agreed with it (C-41a).

(END)

REACTION TO SUPERSTAR

A Preliminary Survey

AMERICAN JEWISH  
ARCHIVES

The American Jewish Committee  
Institute of Human Relations  
165 East 56 Street, New York, N. Y. 10022

## Christian Reaction

The Rev. Malcolm Boyd, a prominent Episcopal clergyman and author, reviewed the film Jesus Christ Superstar in the July 15th edition of Newsday. Father Boyd wrote:

"...Now we come to the heart of the mystery that inexplicably shrouds this movie. It is anti-Semitic. Oberammergau couldn't top this one. Jew-haters, whether in Germany or Middle America, will rub their hands with glee and chortle loudly - maybe go out and get drunk in a combination of bewilderment and delight that somebody else, no doubt inadvertently, has done their work for them - when they sit down in a theater to see 'Jesus Christ Superstar'...

Now 'Jesus Christ Superstar,' with its G rating which will draw in families and youths, equates Jewishness with villainy. Jewish priests, scowling unhealthily beneath their grotesque hats that resemble medieval caricatures, peer down from a scaffold at the Middle-American Jesus who strides up the road surrounded not by sweaty disciples but - of course - flower children. Theirs is the kingdom; their enemy (shades of Nixon Enemy Lists!) is organized religion - and this is Judaism represented before our eyes by unsmiling, conniving, murderous, unprincipled, unloving, always Machiavellian Jewish priests. Voila!

The film's dialog introduces Jewish references that cannot be found in the Bible. Why were they glued onto the script? Pilate addresses the crowd, 'Look at me - am I a Jew?' He says: 'You Jews produce messiahs by the sackful.'

The movie tells the Passion story against a backdrop of modern Israel. So the Temple scene shows machine guns for sale - this, a long giraffe's leap from the money-changers' tables in the Temple. When this is combined with the film's imagery of Judas running from military tanks driven over the desert, as warplanes streak through the sky overhead, one has another unmistakable, violent, clear image: Israel as militaristic, a warlike nation possessing invincible power. This lends nothing to the telling of the Christ story. Indeed, it provides the most jarring of distractions.

When the Broadway version of 'Jesus Christ Superstar' presented a black Judas, I simply accepted this as a producer's decision. However, Black Judas is back again in the movie, and this time I find that I have serious questions about the casting, primarily because of the film's potential impact on a worldwide audience.

There is a scene, for example, when Judas angrily stalks away from Jesus. Dozens of white hands are raised in a praise-and-clapping sequence; superimposed over these is the departing and alienated black figure. This scene will be instantly understood in South Africa or anywhere else - alas, locations are legion - where Manichaeism still lurks in human minds, black is night and white is day, black is death and white is Easter lilies of resurrection.

The producer-director, Norman Jewison (who is not a Jew, despite the fact that many people would ironically construe from his name that he was), has stated that his casting of Judas had to do only with the excellence of the performer. Yet black Judas, critically standing apart from Jesus and his followers, speaks in a condemnatory manner of their spending money on ointment when there are 'people who are hungry, people who are starving' - this, in an explicit modern Israeli film location. His presence unmistakably suggests a Third World identification. Symbolism in juxtaposition with the film's script speaks for itself.

This racial mark takes on bizarre connotations when Judas says to the Jewish priests, 'I don't need your blood money,' an exacerbating line in an era of strained Jewish-black relations in the schools and changing neighborhoods of modern American urban life. Black Judas reaches out for the bag of death money. A Jewish priest drops it on the ground. Black Judas kneels down to pick up the Jewish money, a scowl on his face. Uh-uh. If this was done without any awareness of present racial tension amid urban stress, it reflects an incredible human insensitivity..."

In an editorial in the July 11, 1973 edition of the

Tennessee Register, a publication of the Roman Catholic diocese of Nashville, Rev. Owen F. Campion wrote:

"...This newspaper can hardly object to any media using Jesus and his ministry as subject matter for presentation to an audience. But it must seriously object if such a presentation falls short of historical truth, or, even worse, implies and even directs abuse at a particular group burdened for centuries by the charge of 'killing Christ,' namely, the Jewish people.

The Second Vatican Council, speaking the thought of the Church and 'deploring' such past condemnations of Jews, stated that the agony and death of Christ could not be blamed on 'all the Jews then living.' Its statements, published in the Declaration of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, were founded upon a realization of the unique place of the people of Israel in the plan of God and upon the facts of the passion of Christ themselves.

Of all the events of the life and ministry of Jesus, none is so deliberately recorded as is the record of his crucifixion, and preceding trial and harrassment. These events are recalled in the Gospels.

In analysis of 'Jesus Christ, Super Star,' Gerald Strober, of the American Jewish Committee, a man of scholarship and fairness, listed at least seven occasions when the script of the new movie departs from any similarity with the Gospel records...

...the script brings together Judas, the traitor, and Annas, father-in-law of Caiaphas. Annas demands Judas' cooperation, rebuking his misgiving. And, after the fact of the betrayal, a priest other than Annas roughly consoles Judas for his disloyalty. No where do the Gospels record such meetings.

Still later, the Jewish priests refer to the earlier execution of John the Baptist in words implying their responsibility for the action. Even elementary readers of the Gospels know that John was beheaded by King Herod, and then hardly in conspiracy with religion, but in the frenzy of lust provoked by ambition.

Further along, the priests are pictured as having whipped Jesus in a most vicious manner. The Gospels do speak of an attendant striking Jesus, accusing him of disrespect to Caiaphas, but beating is a very sorry exaggeration. The scrouging Christ endured was upon the order of Pontius

Pilate, the Roman governor. It was part of the ghastly ritual of imperial execution, and contemporary history states that it was most offensive to the Jewish people.

'Super Star' takes off in another fantasy flight by including 'Pilate's Dream' in its score. According to the Gospel, Pilate had no dream. A brief, cryptic reference to his wife's dream is found in Matthew 27:19, but her reservations seem to have had no lasting affect upon her husband's judgment.

The score, in fact, portrays Pilate to be a rather deserving man, reasonable, considerate, and just. The Gospels picture him as a cynic, cultivating the favor of the emperor.

History remembers him as a brutal, revengeful man, who subsequently was summoned to Rome to be tried for oppression. In Matthew 20:17-19, Mark 10:32-34, and Luke 18:32, Jesus himself predicted that he would die at Roman hands.

Finally, there is the movie's generous treatment of Judas Iscariot. He is shown as one of the Chosen especially close to the Lord. No where do the Gospels give him such status. He was not called aside at Tabor when Christ was transfigured, he received no special commission as did Peter, and, in fact, is mentioned so briefly and occasionally that to call him Christ's 'right hand man' as does 'Super Star' is fantasy.

THE TENNESSEE REGISTER would welcome a motion picture based upon the ministry of Jesus Christ. It feels, however, that 'Jesus Christ, Super Star' fails to represent that ministry. On the contrary, it distorts it.

Fiction could be tolerated, if the message taught were uplifting. But the implications of this motion picture generalize and condemn. They gather the Jews of Jesus' day together, and together condemns them of killing him. This is not the fact of history; it is not the teaching of the Church."

The Rev. John Streater, pastor of the First Baptist Church of San Francisco, in commenting on the film Jesus Christ Superstar, said:

"It is both anti-Christian and anti-Jewish. In the gospel of John, Jesus himself says, 'Therefore doth my

Father love me, because I lay down my life that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down, and I have the power to take it again. This commandment have I received of the Father.' This film stands against the true statements of Jesus Christ as well as possibly planting new seeds of hate for God's chosen people, the Jews."

Statement on Jesus Christ Superstar issued by the Church

Council of Greater Seattle on July 24, 1973:

"...Jesus Christ Superstar attempts to translate directly into modern idiom, but instead places its own distortions on what we understand to already be interpretive historical understanding. It is clear that Jesus' own essential disagreement with some members of his own Jewish community moved to a more generalized anti-Jewish bias in the early Church as is reflected in some of the Gospel materials. These materials translate to the screen in 'Superstar' as gross anti-Semitism. Such historical distortion is forgetful of the Gospel claim that Christ's passion and death were on behalf of all men, a claim which does not permit the placing of blame or guilt on anyone or any people in particular.

Where the movie moves away from the New Testament material and attempts to write its own scenario, these anti-semitic distortions and stereotypes are even greater. We find particularly distasteful the movie's fantasy interpretations of Herod, the High Priests, and Jesus in the Temple. While any interpretation of the New Testament does lead to distortion, these distortions perpetuate either conscious or unconscious anti-Semitism in relation to Christian tradition.

We feel, in particular, that children and youth viewing this film should be aware of these distortions, so that they, unlike many of us, will not have to relearn this history at a later date in life.

We encourage persons in the church to use the present showing of this film (and also the film production of 'Godspell' which provides an interesting and more positive comparison in relation to the criticism of 'Superstar') as a time for education. We do not suggest censorship of any kind. Pastoral leaders, youth leaders, and other lay leaders, should use the occasion of our members' attending this film for discussion of biblical misinterpretation which continues to lead to anti-Semitic stereotypes."

On July 26, 1973, Rev. Robert F. Drinan, S. J. a member of Congress from Massachusetts issued a statement headed "'Jesus Christ Superstar' Debases Both Judaism and Christianity".

"I must say that I am in substantial agreement with the commentaries from individuals such as Reverend Malcolm Boyd, an Episcopal priest, and Mr. Jerry Strober, a Protestant minister. These two critics state that the movie is anti-semitic and will in all probability arouse all types of latent anti-Jewish prejudices. Reverend Malcolm Boyd states that 'Oberammergau couldn't top this one'. Reverend Strober concludes that 'Superstar' defames the Jewish people because it distorts the gospel story of Christ and particularly of the passion.

I have no credentials as a movie critic and no expert knowledge as to the impact which a film can make on the prejudices of individuals. But I do know that the Second Vatican Council said categorically that what happened in Christ's passion 'cannot be charged against all of the Jews, without distinction, then alive, nor against the Jews of today'.

Although I know little about evaluating contemporary films I found 'Superstar' to be a bore. It is not credible or even, for the most part, plausible. I would hope that parents and religious counselors would not seek to direct adults or children to this film with the hope that somehow they might acquire some 'religion' from this movie. They would learn nothing about Christianity or Judaism from this film. Indeed their worst misconceptions of both religions might be confirmed by seeing 'Jesus Christ Superstar'."

The Rev. J. Fletcher Lowe, Jr., President of the Clergy Association of the Richmond Area, sent the following letter to the clergy of the Richmond Metropolitan Area on July 9th, 1973:

"As the title of this movie has instant appeal to members of the religious community, and as it is presently being shown in Richmond, I write to you about concerns voiced by a group of Christian and Jewish clergy and lay persons who met to discuss its implications.

It is a Passion Play of the last seven days of Christ's pre-resurrected life, set to rock music. The problems encountered were less with the music and cinematography as with the dialogue and historical authenticity, such as:

1. Christians will find no resurrection, and a Jesus more to be pitied than adored.
2. Jews will find priests, Pharisees and the crowds stereotyped villains and vultures.
3. Blacks will find Judas bordering on an 'Uncle Tom.'

I am, therefore, writing to you not in an attempt to dissuade anyone from attending, but to suggest that you prepare those attending for these and other distortions which could aggravate Black-white and Christian-Jewish relations. Furthermore, the very presence of these distortions could be used fruitfully in discussions with young people and adults to deal with these issues.

I am enclosing a recent article by the respected A.P. Religion Editor, George Cornell, which appeared in The Times Dispatch, as further background."

The Rev. C. Albert Koob, of Washington D.C., President of the National Catholic Educational Association, in a letter to

Rabbi Marc Tanenbaum, dated July 3, 1973, said:

"You have done us a great service. Sincere thanks to you for your kindness in sending the materials on the analysis of the movie version of Jesus Christ Superstar. The Strober analysis is well done. The film version of this stage play could really set us back decades in our attempts to arrive at better Jewish-Christian understanding.

I will make reference to this material in the next issue of our newsletter which is scheduled for early fall to reach both the teachers and the school administrators. We should be reaching the schools just about the time when local theaters will be receiving the film."

Sister Margaret Ellen Traxler of Chicago, Executive Director of the National Catholic Conference for Interracial Justice, commented:

"We are dismayed at the newly released "G" rated film 'Jesus Christ Superstar.' It is anti-Semitic and racially biased."

In a letter to the Pittsburgh Catholic, (July 6, 1973) Msgr. Francis A. Glenn, Chairman of the Council for Ecumenism of the Diocese of Pittsburgh wrote:

"Vatican Council II, in its 'Declaration on the Relation of the Church to non-Christian Religions' repudiates all persecutions, against any man, 'and deplores the hatred, persecutions, and displays of anti-Semitism directed against the Jews at any time and from any source'.

Regretfully the current motion picture, 'Jesus Christ Superstar' falls under this repudiation in that it continues to insinuate that the Jews as a group are collectively guilty of the death of Christ, and it promotes the idea of the Jews as conspirators against Jesus. Moreover, the casting of Judas in this motion picture will injure racial as well as ecumenical relations.

The rating of this picture as fit for general patronage, and the probable promotion of attendance by well-meaning parents and teachers, will mean that many children will be exposed to an anti-Jewish presentation of the Gospel story that is a contradiction of the teachings of the Vatican Council that 'what happened in His passion cannot be charged against all the Jews, without distinction, then alive,

nor against the Jews of today. Although the Church is the new People of God, the Jews should not be presented as rejected or accursed by God, as if this followed from the Holy Scriptures."

Sister M. Danita Lyons, Area Coordinator of the Franciscan Sisters of Allegany said on July 11, 1973:

"I concur with your views and those of Mr. Strober of the unfortunate and deplorable effect that this film may have on Christian-Jewish relations. I will do all I can to publish this report to the Sisters in this area and trust that they will in turn use the Analysis in their work with students."

Sister Mary Rita Dooney, Regional Superior of the Columban Sisters wrote to Rabbi Tanenbaum on July 9, 1973 as follows:

"I am deeply concerned about the anti-Semitism which, you tell me, this movie exhibits.

I shall share your communication with all our Sisters in the United States so that they can inform the groups with whom they work concerning those matters which you have drawn to my attention."

In a letter dated July 12, 1973, Mother M. Viola, Superior General of the Sisters of the Third Order of St. Francis wrote to Rabbi Marc Tanenbaum:

"It is sad that in this day and age when we are trying to understand each other that such a movie as, Jesus Christ Superstar, not only misrepresents a very holy incident in the life of Christ, but also does a great deal of damage to a very holy and good notion."

The Superintendent of Schools (Rev. John J. Leibrecht) of the Archdiocese of St. Louis wrote on July 10th to the local American Jewish Committee area director:

"It is with sentiments of sincere gratitude that I wish to acknowledge receipt of your very interesting critique of the forthcoming movie 'Jesus Christ Superstar'. You can be sure that we appreciate the points that you made in the criticism."

### Jewish Reactions

Milton K. Susman, the columnist for the Jewish Chronicle (Pittsburgh) wrote in the July 5, 1973 edition:

"I am baffled by Norman Jewison; there are few, if any, finer film-makers walking around today. After 'Fiddler on the Roof,' which faithfully and sympathetically revealed to millions (most non-Jews) the tradition, the heart and indestructibility of the Jews, Jewison now comes up with 'Jesus Christ Superstar,' shot wholly in Israel of all places, which twists history into an unabashed anachronism.

...when 'Superstar' gets down to immutable facts, it is in trouble.

And it spells trouble for us Jews. For it holds Jews collectively responsible for Jesus' death, an ancient bubble which has already been bursted; it has Jews screaming 'Crucify him, crucify him!' when this method of death-dealing was actually unknown to Jews at that time; it records that Jesus died because Jewish priests conspired with the Pharisees thereby distorting the documented truth that the Romans were the culprits, and, finally the movie shows Jesus severely flogged before he is forced to tote the cross to his doom.

The showing I caught at the Warner had an even younger audience than the stage version attracted to the Nixon last Spring. Average age I would put at 19 or 20.

I blush to think of the twisted notions these impressionable youngsters took from the theater to their homes and classrooms because a resourceful producer took unwarranted liberties with religious history.

Any Jew who feels uneasy about the implications of this film can hardly be blamed. The damage it is capable of doing is at the moment immeasurable..."

An editorial entitled "'Superstar' Film More Insulting to Christians" appeared in the July 13, 1973 edition of the Jewish News (Detroit). The editorial says:

"....The new version is promoted as a Passion Play -- and this very assignation already condemns the production as prejudiced because the Passion Plays of Oberammergau have for many decades served to arouse hatreds, to perpetuate the venom of accusing Jews of being 'Christ killers,' to call into play all the appeals to disrespect of every effort to create better Christian-Jewish relations.

The thorough study of the film by the eminent Christian scholar, Gerald Strober, exposes the anti-Semitism of the Jewison production so devastatingly that there is cause for amazement that there wasn't more proper evaluation of the script by either the producers or the supervisors of the Israeli acting teams.

Community responsibility to be on guard so that such errors should not be repeated is very vital. Now there is the added duty to secure the cooperation of churches to explain the bigotries and exaggeration to those of their groups who may be lured to see the new film. Misunderstandings and delusions must be averted.

The best in ecumenism could be destroyed by films of this nature which already seems to attract family gatherings--and under such a label young minds will be poisoned much more than all the films now declared prohibited for youth audiences.

Just because the producer of the new film has to his credit the Sholem Aleichem 'Fiddler' does not render the anti-Jewish New Testament product acceptable to

any audience, let alone viewers who could otherwise be brought into the ranks of the unprejudiced religiously. The 'Superstar' as a film is so objectionable that it is to be hoped that Christians more than Jews will condemn it."

The Connecticut Ledger of June 28, 1973 carried an editorial entitled "An Unholy Production". The editorial stated:

"...from all the reports that have come to us, this movie is not going to add to the nurture of a greater spirit of good will, of understanding and of friendship. We are told that it is historically inaccurate, in motive sensational, and will not add to the growth of that hoped for ecumenical spirit which promised so much in recent years. We understand it is a picture that alienates and antagonizes and is altogether unworthy of the theme with which it deals.

Why is it produced at this time? We are not certain, of course; but if judging it as its best, the motive was propaganda, then it seems to succeed in arousing resistance which will not help it. If the motive was sensationalism for the sake of profits, money, then it is surely unworthy, if not contemptible.

We hope that the American people, in responding to it, will give it the kind of treatment which may discourage any future attempt to utilize sacred themes to unworthy ends."

A column by Michael Elkin headed Anti-Semitism Abounds in 'Superstar' appeared in the June 29, 1973 edition of the Exponent (Philadelphia). Mr. Elkin wrote:

"....Now Jesus has come to the big screen and the distortions on stage and the glamorizations have gone big time and many Jewish organizations are protesting that the image of the Jew is being tarnished in living color in front of millions who have shelled out their \$3 for this G-rated film."

Mr. Elkin then detailed "the films incidious distortions."

He concludes by stating:

"Jesus Christ is making it big with today's religiously unschooled youth, whether dressed in a Superman's outfit ('Godspell') or in flowing robes ('Jesus Christ Superstar'). The problem is to disentangle the reality from Hollywood. And to an impressionable youngster what is on the screen is larger than life. And in this case larger than truth."

Rabbi Marvin I. Bash of the Arlington-Fairfax (Va.) Jewish Congregation wrote to Rabbi Marc Tanenbaum:

"I read with great interest the pamphlet on Jesus Christ Superstar. It is a fine piece of work and Mr. Strober is to be commended for his intelligent and non-emotional review.

Is it possible to obtain this paper in quantity? If so, I would appreciate receiving (250 copies for a mailing to my congregants."

Mrs. J. Wasserstrom, chairman of the Church-State and Inter-religious Affairs Committee of the Jewish Community Relations Bureau of Kansas City commented in the July 20, 1973 issue of the Kansas City Jewish Chronicle:

"...the Jewish community and particularly our young people should be prepared to deal with the anti-Semitic reaction which may result from this revival of old falsehoods and stereotypes."

Dr. Robert Chazan, Professor of Jewish Studies at the Ohio State University states:

" 'Pontius Pilate is presented as a man in conflict, Judas is presented as a man very deeply in conflict,' .... 'But the only unconflicted group is the Jews, and they're presented as a kind of incarnation of evil and hatred'."

### Black Reaction

An editorial written by Charles A. Loeb in the July 7th edition of the Call and Post (Cleveland) stated:

"....The American Jewish Committee, rightfully, feels that the movie is an affront to the Jewish People and particularly to the Jewish Priesthood, whose members are portrayed as stannically evil; contemptuous, callous, sadistic and bloodthirsty; attributes that find no support in the New Testament, which is the primary source for information about Jesus' life and death.

In addition to the feeling that the film will incite an increase in the already prevalent anti-Semitism that persists in Christian America, the film also manages to preserve anti-Negro stereotypes, since it depicts Judas, the betrayer of Jesus, as a black man, both in the stage version and in the movie. Given a most prominent part in the movie, this black Judas is represented as a victim of Jewish perfidy, a 'cat's paw' for Jewish interests. In one scene 'Damned for All Time' a Jewish Priest holds out a bag of money for Judas to take; but as Judas reaches for the money, the priest drops it on the ground with a contemptuous smirk...

One is forced to wonder what has happened to the sensitive black souls of yesteryear who mounted attacks and, at least, voiced strong resentment over the black-faced comedians of that era, always characterized as a studid, drawing, buffoon.

A black Judas, we hope, may reawaken some of that old fight and fire, at least to the extent that we can say 'Amen' to the Jew's resentment over a piece of incoherent burlesque, replete with material that resurrects all of the vernom of anti-Semitism so many have worked so hard to quell....

There's little that either Negroes or Jews can do to stop the distribution of this perfidious film (rated G) to vast audiences that will contain susceptible children, but at least both races can mount an effective protest by staying away from the box office."

The June 30, 1973 edition of the Milwaukee Courier carried a long article entitled "Superstar Seen Threat to Black-Jewish Peace."

Other Comments

In a review of the film which appeared in the June 29th edition of the Washington Post, Gary Arnold stated:

"....I can't imagine any responsible Christian organizations rushing to the defense of the show either, in part because the Jewish criticisms are justified and in part because the material does nothing for Christianity except to commercialize it. 'Jesus Christ Superstar' offers no insight into the life, teachings or motives of Christ, no coherent vision of why his ministry might be exemplary or relevant. Jesus is depicted as a saintly sacred cow with pop celebrity attributes, and as far as one can judge from his words and actions, the public adulation and the grind of three straight years on the road are beginning to get him down. The character has no 'religious' dimensions worthy of the term. He simply receives the reverent photographic treatment reserved for every movie Jesus.

While one would prefer to believe that the show is harmlessly studied and that only insecure clergymen-the sort who will do almost anything to con kids into the church-will support it, the Jewish objections should be noted. I think responsible Christian parents owe it to themselves and their kids to be aware of the criticisms in advance.

There's no longer any excuse for perpetuating the notion of Jewish guilt for the death of Christ. The men responsible for 'Jesus Christ Superstar' seem to perpetuate it out of sheer laziness and lack of imagination. Instead of providing a modern interpretation of the Passion, they simply borrow the Passion Play traditions and 'modernize' them with rock music and vernacular lyrics..."

In a review of the film published in the July 21, 1973 edition of the Chicago Daily News, David Elliott commented:

"The offense given to Jews, Negroes and homosexuals could have won the movie a G-rating from Hitler."

Louise Sweeney in a review of the film which appeared in the July 2nd edition of the Christian Science Monitor wrote:

"...This concept of Jesus as a temperamental social celebrity, about to lose his audience, is far from the Christian tradition, and so is the film's treatment of the Jewish attitudes about him. In the Jewison production, the Jewish priests, in their huge black onion-shaped hats and black capes, appear to be cast as supervillains. The priests are here portrayed as sinister, merciless, murderous, not content until they whipped the Jewish people into demanding Jesus; crucifixion by a reluctant Pontius Pilate. The National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council, representing nine major Jewish organizations, has denounced the film for 'dramatizing and exaggerating some of the most baneful anti-Jewish notions' concerning 'the old falsehood of the Jews' collective responsibility for the death of Jesus..."

Earl Hansen writing in the column "Dialogue" in the July 12, 1973 edition of the Seattle Post Intelligencer stated:

"...Worried parents and Sunday school teachers, ever-concerned and looking for ways to keep kids interested 'in the spiritual things,' are advised this time around to practice what they preach..."

The Temple scene in 'Jesus Christ Superstar' reveals sheer chaos and corruption. The place is filled with drug pushers, sellers of machine guns, and, as the AJC says, 'people bizarre in dress, with never a sign of religious feeling'...

The AJC plus the Jewish Anti-Defamation League, is currently campaigning to make their position on the film known through American churches.

Their hope is that 'those who choose to profit from anti-Semitism...will not be allowed to stand unchallenged either by Jews or by other people of good will who seek to create a world of decency and mutual respect.'

In a letter published in the July 20, 1973 edition of The Pilot (Boston) Mr. Joseph J. Reilly wrote:

"Jesus Christ Superstar is a near hit as a record album and a near miss as a movie. It not only offends aesthetically in the latter medium, but also unfortunately could cause a resurgence of anti-Semitic caricaturing and discrimination.

Norman Jewison has tastelessly intermingled biblical inaccuracies with current events. Worse, he has painted the Jewish Priests as undimensional personifications of self-seeking and evil who are therefore less than believable. It is incredible that a usually sensitive Boston film critic has labeled 'paranoic' the valid objections of the American Jewish Congress to this ecumenical and artistic near-disaster.

Dr. S. Modell, Associate Professor of History, Los Angeles Valley College wrote to the American Jewish Committee:

"I agree completely with Gerald S. Strober's analysis of 'Jesus Christ Superstar' and believe I could easily distribute 200 copies of Mr. Strober's study to colleagues and students on my campus. I would appreciate your sending me that number if you can spare them."

The following comments were included in letters to the St. Louis area director of the American Jewish Committee.

"...I especially appreciate your analysis of Jesus Christ Superstar, and feel there are many pertinent points contained in it."

Rev. Richard B. Jones, Executive Director,  
Ministerial Enlistment and Nurture, Board  
of Higher Education, Christian Church  
(Disciples of Christ)

"Thank you for forwarding to me a copy of the critical analysis of the Universal Pictures Film version of 'Jesus Christ Superstar'. If you could provide me about 50 copies of this document, I would like to distribute it to the members of the Advisory Board of the Missouri Catholic Conference."

Louis C. DeFeo, Jr.  
General Counsel, Missouri Catholic  
Conference

The Ministry of Commerce and Industry of the State of Israel issued the following statement on July 13, 1973:

A. Any producer of films, and any film company, that are interested in producing a film in Israel are entitled to do so, and no statutory means exist to prevent them. Year after year, dozens of foreign films are produced in Israel, and the government of Israel interferes neither in the determination of their content nor in the actual local production.

B. Nevertheless, and in the light of the delicate subject-matter of the film "Jesus-Super-Star", the Ministry of Commerce and Industry approached the director, and the producing company, and urged that care be taken to ensure that the film contained no passages calculated to offend the religious susceptibilities or views of Jewish and other circles. In this approach, emphasis was laid on the risk that the film might portray traditional anti-Semitic stereotypes.

C. In response to the Ministry's approach, the producing company announced that no offensive passages would appear in the film. The director stressed that he would not associate himself with the production of a film in which there were anti-Semitic nuances.

D. Having regard to the statements of the company and of the director, the competent Israeli authority sees no ground for exerting pressure on the company to shift the film's production out of Israel, not least in view of the fact that the law provides no possibility of preventing the production of foreign films in Israel, and the company would have produced the film in any case.

E. It would be very distressing and most disappointing if it should prove that, in spite of the specific undertakings and promises of the producers, the film should include, after all, passages of a nature to offend the Jewish people. The fact that it has been photographed in Israel in no way constitutes an expression of any agreement whatsoever to it on the part of the Government of Israel. In any event, the creators and producers of the film are alone and exclusively responsible for its content.



FO-CIN

**THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE**

memorandum

**date** July 31, 1973

**to** Marc Tanenbaum

**from** Norma Moss

**subject** JESUS CHRIST SUPERSTAR

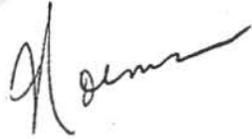
Enclosed find Catholic Telegraph movie ratings which you have probably seen. It rates Superstar "Adult Only." Also enclosed is a small article which appeared in the Cincinnati Post & Times Star of 7/20, which I found very interesting. This is the first time I have noted the words "Parents should note certain liberties have been taken with traditional accounts of the Passion of Christ."

Have sent you ads which have appeared heretofore but find the one enclosed from the Cincinnati Enquirer of 7/29 fascinating. I have never seen anything just like it before. Have you?

The fourth enclosure, I believe, is syndicated and perhaps you have already seen it.

Best regards.

cc - Isaiah Terman  
Seymour Brief



NBM:rw

P. 150

7/29/72

**JESUS CHRIST SUPERSTAR:** The famed Webber-Rice rock opera is on the screen and the score has been rendered with aural magnificence. Director Norman Jewison's concept of the film is to mix the modern with the traditional. Parents should note certain liberties have been taken with traditional accounts of the Passion of Christ. For older children (Showcase).

*Amurto*

THE PAPER STATION

*Catholic* **Movie Ratings** *Catholic Telegraph*  
7-27-73

(Ratings and comments provided by the Division for Film and Broadcasting, U.S. Catholic Conference)

**A-1 GENERAL PATRONAGE**

Charlotte's Web, Fiddler on the Roof, Godspell, Her Twelve Men, Lost Horizon, Mary Poppins, The Patsy, Sound of Music, Sword in the Stone, Tom Sawyer.

**A-2 ADULTS AND ADOLESCENTS**

Battle for the Planet of the Apes, Crisis, Death of a Salesman, The Great Sioux Massacre, The Hook, Hot Millions, The Invitation, S.O.S. Pacific, The Sundowners, Waco, Young at Heart.

**A-3 ADULTS ONLY**

Cabaret, Day of the Jackal, Five Man Army, 40 Carats, Jesus Christ Superstar, Joe Kidd, Last of Sheila, Live and Let Die, Money, Money, Money, Paper Moon, Revengers, Touch of Class.

**A-4 SEPARATE CLASSIFICATION**

Dillinger (Morbid and bloody; reflects man's fascination with guns)

Emperor of the North (Adult material)

The Getaway (A film for the mature and stomach-hardened viewer)

Lady Sings the Blues (The remarkable performance of Diana Ross makes the rough language and seamy situations almost bearable)

Ludwig (A pointless exercise in pictorial opulence)

**B MORALLY OBJECTIONABLE**

The Group (Numerous erotic elements in the treatment of the film are unduly emphasized and are without dramatic necessity for the telling of the story)

High Plains Drifter (Excessive violence presents sexist attitudes toward women)

Scarecrow (Film degenerates into some pretty explicit scenes of the seamy side of life on the road)

Stage Fright (1950)

Track of the Cat (1955)

**C CONDEMNED**

Hammer, Last Tango in Paris, Moon is Blue (1953), Straw Dogs, Walking Tall.

Jerusalem, 13. July 1973.

Arising out of Press Articles about the film "Jesus - Super - Star" the Spokesman of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry has issued the following explanation:

- A. Any producer of films, and any film company that are interested in producing a film in Israel are entitled to do so, and no statutory means exist to prevent them. Year after year, dozens of foreign films are produced in Israel and the Government of Israel interferes neither in the determination of their content nor in the actual production.
- B. Nevertheless, and in the light of the delicate subject-matter of the film "Jesus-Super-Star", the Ministry of Commerce and Industry approached the director, and the producing company, and urged that care be taken to ensure that the film contained no passages calculated to offend the religious susceptibilities or views of Jewish and other circles. In this approach, emphasis was laid on the risk that the film might portray traditional anti-semitic stereotypes.
- C. In response to the Ministry's approach, the producing company announced that no offensive passage would appear in the film. The director stressed that he would not associate himself with the production of a film in which there were anti-semitic nuances.
- D. Having regard to the statements of the company and of the director, the competent Israeli authority sees no ground for exerting pressure on the company to shift the film's production out of Israel, not least in view of the fact that the law provides no possibility of preventing the production of foreign films in Israel, and the company would have produced the film in any case.
- E. It would be very distressing and most disappointing if it should prove that, in spite of the specific undertakings and promises of the producers, the film should include, after all, passages of a nature to offend the Jewish People. The fact that it has been photographed in Israel in no way constitutes an expression of any agreement whatsoever to it on the part of the Government of Israel. In any event, the creators and producers of the film are alone and exclusively responsible for its content. (")

July 29, 1973

**WINS RELIGION COMMENTARY**  
**RABBI MARC H. TANENBAUM\* OF THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE**  
**"JESUS CHRIST SUPERSTAR OPENS IN NEW YORK"**

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On Wednesday, August 8th, the film Jesus Christ Superstar will open simultaneously at several movie houses in New York City. The Universal Pictures production has been shown in some 55 cities during July, and has been the subject of heated controversy in virtually every city where it has played. In Denver, for example, some 100 churches sent thousands of petitions to movie-owners to protest what they called a "sinful depiction of Jesus Christ." In Boston, a Catholic theologian, Father R. J. Powers wrote in the Catholic Pilot that "Jesus Christ Superstar tampers with truth and plays fancy with the gospels, theology, and history, and therefore it is not acceptable." In Cleveland, a black newspaper columnist, Charles Loeb of the Call and Post, expressed outrage over the portrayal of Judas, the betrayer of Jesus, as a black man, and called on the black community to protest this new and damaging racist stereotype "by staying away from the box office." And, as is widely known, virtually every Jewish religious and civic agency has spoken out vigorously against the Jesus Christ Superstar film on the basis of its horrendous portrayal of Jewish priests and pharisees as sadistically evil and inhuman, and the Jewish people as bloodthirsty villains collectively responsible for the death of Jesus.

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\* Rabbi Tanenbaum, who is National Director of Interreligious Affairs of the American Jewish Committee, presents a weekly religion commentary over WINS-tinghouse Broadcasting System.

Outside the so-called Jewish establishment, rumors abound in the streets of New York that the August 8th opening will be attended by calls for boycotts, picketing, demonstrations, and other means of expressing popular protest against the needless defamation of Jews, Christians, and blacks.

It needs to be made clear that no national Jewish organization or representative Jewish leader has called for boycott or for censorship in any form. The Jewish community has a long-standing and unbroken commitment to civil liberties and freedom of expression. Universal Pictures and the producer-director, Norman Jewison, have a right to tell their story. By the same token, Jewish groups and others have an equal right to put before the conscience and the intelligence of the moviegoer their conviction that this film is not just another entertainment, to be judged solely by aesthetic or artistic standards. Rather the crux of the matter is that this film is first and foremost a Passion Play and its baneful moral and religious distortions must be confronted and corrected by accurate historical and theological knowledge. As one Florida movie critic wrote last week, the film does to the Jews what Hollywood movies about cowboys and Indians have done to the Indians. It is bad enough that a G rating and the film's eventual showing over network television will expose thousands of vulnerable children to the bombardment of multimedia images of the alleged nefarious role of the Jews as Christ-killers - an ancient falsehood which Vatican Council II and other

Christian authorities have decisively rejected. It is absolutely unforgiveable that this film with its built-in anti-Jewish thesis will be shown in Latin America, Italy, Germany and Austria, and possibly in Arabic-language versions - countries where the Christ-killer charges incite or are exploited by anti-Semites for regular attacks against Jewish persons and their property.

Universal Pictures and Norman Jewison have a fundamental moral obligation not to allow that to happen, and despite their arrogant refusal to meet with the American Jewish Committee, they will be held publicly accountable if their film does provoke such anti-Jewish actions.

Finally, if this justified concern over Jesus Christ Superstar here and abroad achieves nothing else, it will give impetus to a growing conviction among many Christians as well as Jews that all Passion Plays - from Oberammergau to Jesus Christ Superstar - ought to be voluntarily abandoned until such time as a morally-sensitive and genuinely informed creative artist will find a way to dramatize the Passion account so that it contributes to love, mutual respect, and reconciliation, rather than to hatred and vilification.

MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS  
JERUSALEM



Copy sent to MHT  
8/2

משרד החוץ  
ירושלים

Director,  
Church Relations Division  
No.1345

*Handwritten initials*

Jerusalem, 26. July 1973.

Rabbi Marc H. Tanenbaum  
National Director of interreligious affairs  
American Jewish Committee  
165 East 56th Street  
New York, N.Y. 10022

Dear Marc:

Your letter of the 18th came to hand yesterday, - and the copy of your letter to Martin, of Universal Pictures, - to-day. Thank you for both.

I hasten to reply.

On Superstar a Statement was issued by the Spokesman of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry (which is responsible for the film industry in Israel) on the 13th inst. It was cabled the same day to the NY Consulate and the Embassy in Washington. That a copy should not have reached you by the 18th I find incomprehensible. Please find enclosed the text of the Statement.

I fully agree with you that the prevention of German/Italian/Spanish etc. editions of this film would be a veritable Mitzva; but how can this be achieved? Maybe, meanwhile, there is a response from Martin, with some reference to this important point, too.

I am also obliged for the radio script on your broadcast on ~~on~~ Famine in Africa. I understand that you are in touch with Ovadia Soffer of our UN Delegation: By now he will have provided you with some useful data and details. He is kept au courant and should be able to coordinate this whole complex with you.

Lastly: Let me thank you warmly for your readiness to assist in my planned visit this coming fall. As soon as Bernie is back here I'll get together with him in order to work out the details.

With cordial regards

*Michael Pragai*  
Michael Pragai

Enclosure: One

M. Tenenbaum

BCC: Selma Hirsh

820 North Plankinton Avenue Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53203 (414) 272-8510

31 July 1973

Mr. Lew Wasserman  
Chairman of the Board  
MCA Inc.  
Universal Studios  
100 Universal City Plaza  
Universal City, California 91608

Dear Mr. Wasserman:

Pursuant to our recent telephone conversation, I believe the following comments are in order.

Representatives of The American Jewish Committee attended the June 8th screening of Jesus Christ Superstar in New York. They, of course, understood that the film was already completed and that it was scheduled to open in several cities within a matter of days.

Nevertheless, immediately after the screening, these officials, greatly concerned over the interreligious and intergroup implications of the film, agreed that a detailed scholarly analysis of the film should be prepared. That analysis was sent to Dr. Neil Sandberg, Western Regional Director of The American Jewish Committee, for transmittal to Mr. Allan Rivkin, Director of the Jewish Film Advisory Board, with instructions that Mr. Rivkin immediately forward the analysis to you. On June 19, Mr. Rivkin sent the analysis to Mr. David Lipton. I am also informed that on June 22 Mr. Leonard Yaseen, Chairman of the Interreligious Affairs Commission of The American Jewish Committee, spoke by telephone with Mr. Taft Schreiber. Mr. Yaseen discussed the position of the American Jewish Committee and detailed the Committee's objections to the film.

Without burdening you with historic details, you should know that a number of efforts were made in the fall of 1971, when the Universal-Norman Jewison plans for the film were first announced, to make direct contact with you. Just before the stage play opened,

Mr. Lew Wasserman  
31 July 1973  
Page 2

Mr. Gerald Strober, a Presbyterian educator and interreligious affairs consultant to The American Jewish Committee, prepared an analysis of the play's implications for Jewish-Christian relations—an analysis that touched off a good deal of comment at the time. Mr. Rivkin reported that a copy of this analysis had gone to you personally on October 14, 1971. The same document went to Mr. Jewison. (A copy of Mr. Jewison's letter is enclosed.)

Had we had an opportunity to meet with you, we would have shared the following concerns relating to the advertising and further distribution of the film:

1. We are concerned with photographs released to newspapers which highlight the black garbed priests with captions such as "Annas and other high priests came to the conclusion that Jesus is dangerous and must die." This type of publicity acts to feed the canard that the Jews are responsible for the death of Christ. Such careless publicity defames the Jewish people and can be a potent weapon in the hands of anti-Semites.
2. We urge Universal Pictures to prepare and distribute a prologue and epilogue which would make clear that the film is intended for entertainment purposes and is not to be viewed as a theological or historical document. Such an action would be consistent with recent public statements issued by Universal and Mr. Jewison which will likely never reach the attention of moviegoers unless presented on the screen.
3. In the event that television distribution is planned, we ask that careful consideration be given to the manner in which the film is presented on this medium. We are aware that many films are edited for use on television and we would urge that Superstar be edited to reflect the conclusions reached in the analysis prepared by Mr. Strober.
4. In light of recent overt anti-semitic activities in several areas of the world, we urge that serious consideration be given to release of Spanish,

Mr. Lew Wasserman  
31 July 1973  
Page 3

Portuguese, Italian and German language versions of the film. In addition, we urge that similar consideration be given release of the film in the Arab states for obvious reasons.

I can assure you that The American Jewish Committee is prepared to work cooperatively with you and your associates on a constructive approach to the suggestions raised in this communication.

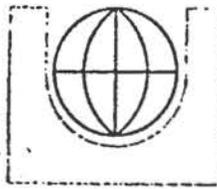
I shall look forward to your early reply.

Very truly yours,

Elmer L. Winter

v  
Enclosure





Universal Pictures Ltd Pinewood Studios, Iver Heath, Bucks. Tel: Iver 700 or Slough 33441

10th May, 1972

Allen Rivkin, Esq.,  
Jewish Film Advisory Committee,  
Box 1644,  
Beverly Hills,  
California 90213,  
U.S.A.

Dear Allen,

Re: 'JESUS CHRIST SUPERSTAR'

I am sorry I didn't have the opportunity to call you when I was last in L.A. and discuss the projected film 'JESUS CHRIST SUPERSTAR'. It was an extremely busy time for me as you can imagine and since I had not definitely committed to the project until I had completed the shooting script, it was academic we talk at that time.

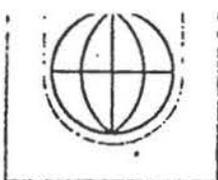
I have read closely Gerald Strober's analysis of the O'Horgan stage production which was sent to me by Morton Yarmon of the American Jewish Committee in November. I have also analysed the presentation written by Milton Senn that you have sent me. I will certainly take, under advisement, the specific suggestions mentioned on Page 8 and the other areas that seem to offend both organisations.

I believe discrimination, in any form, to be an evil. This fact I think is clearly demonstrated in some of my films and television productions. I would hope that the film version of 'JESUS CHRIST SUPERSTAR' will, in its final form, not be found offensive, blasphemous or distasteful by any religious group. What more can I say?

As much as I dislike censorship, pressure groups and lobbying for secular interests of any kind, especially when it is applied to the Arts, I certainly do understand the need for the Anti-Defamation League and appreciate the sensitivity of your position.

It is rather ironic that the 1971 Inter Religious Award granted by the Broadcasting and Film Commission of the National Council of Churches, the Committee on Films of the Synagogue Council

cont/.....



Universal Pictures Ltd Pinewood Studios, Iver Heath, Bucks. Tel: Iver 700 or Slough 33441

Allen Rivkin Continued 2/.....

of America, and the Division for Film and Broadcasting of the United States Catholic Conference, has seen fit to honour my last film 'FIDDLER ON THE ROOF' as a motion picture which demonstrates "man's abiding faith in God's ultimate goodness". Let's hope 'JESUS CHRIST SUPERSTAR' will achieve the same high level.

If I am in Los Angeles in the near future I will contact you personally.

Warmest regards,

Sincerely,

Norman Jewison

c.c. Morton Yarmon ✓  
Ned Tanen - Universal

From *Albert D. Chernin*

August 6, 1973

Dear Marc,

I thought you would find the enclosed of interest. It results from our arranging a screening of "Jesus Christ Superstar" for leaders of several key Protestant denominations. As the letter of Cornelsen indicates, the letter from denominations went to nearly 2,000 Protestant ministers in metropolitan Philadelphia.

cc: Dr. Murray Friedman





JUL 30 1973

metropolitan christian council of philadelphia

1520 RACE STREET □ PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA 19102 □ TELEPHONE (215) 563-7854

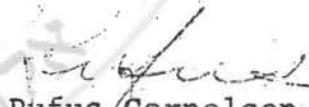
July 27, 1973

Mr. Albert D. Chernin, Executive Director  
Jewish Community Relations Council  
260 South 15th Street  
Philadelphia, PA 19102

Dear Al:

Attached is a letter going to clergy of the Presbytery of Philadelphia which serves as an illustration of the kinds of mailings being sent to the clergy of this denomination in the metropolitan area. This particular letter is, of course, being sent to ministers in the Presbyterian judicatory. Other letters will be going over the signatures of staff persons of other judicatories in this area.

Sincerely yours,

  
Rufus Cornelsen  
Executive Director

RC/js

Attachment

JUL 27 1973



# PRESBYTERY OF PHILADELPHIA

THE UNITED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN THE U. S. A.

2200 LOCUST STREET • PHILADELPHIA, PA. 19103

732-1842

July 25, 1973

MEMORANDUM

TO: All Pastors  
FROM: Paul Wells, Phil Martin  
RE: "Jesus Christ, Superstar"

The history of the Jewish people has been marked by repeated persecution. Much of it has come from "Christian" nations and communities.

Hopefully, none of us have ever intended to be derogatory toward the Jewish people. But as Christian teachers and preachers, we should be sensitive to our interpretation of the gospel material and particularly the passion story. In statements from Vatican II, the Roman Catholic Church sought to counteract a long-standing tradition of anti-Jewish sentiment. For us, the negative role of Pharisees and Priests in the gospel narratives should not imply cause for anti-Semitism but, rather, lead us toward critical examination of our own role as leaders and functionaries in the Christian Church.

Out of sensitivity to a lot of tragic history and to realities still felt by Jewish people, a group of churchmen were invited to see the film, "Jesus Christ, Superstar". In considering its message and impact, we found some causes for concern. We urge you to read the joint statement on the reverse side of this letter.

Surely, the gospel of God's grace can empower us to be gracious toward all peoples in our communities.

PUM:sk

July 25, 1973

Dear Pastor:

The movie, "Jesus Christ Superstar" has now begun its local run. Since many church members will probably see it, and since one or more of the groups in your congregation may discuss it, we urge you to make an effort to counteract the negative impact the film can have on Jewish-Christian relations.

After viewing the film, we felt that Christians discussing its meaning would be so caught up in the questions of faith, theology, and esthetics involved that they would not consider critically its portrayal of Jews. That very situation requires your special help for three reasons: 1) because otherwise its images of Jews would probably go unchallenged, 2) because some people might accept them as accurate (especially since the film is made in Israel), and 3) because the portrayal is negatively biased.

While it is true that the New Testament's images of Priests and Pharisees are not positive -- especially when taken out of their Biblical context -- the film consistently moves toward a more negative portrayal in its attempts at dramatic intensification. The images used for Jewish leaders are negatively overdrawn. For instance, Herod is somewhat weird and surrounded by "weirdos", but much more damaging is the characterization of the Priests as harshly brutal. This characterization is built into their parts, but it is intensified in the way they are played and especially in their strange costumes and set (in which they are likened in one shot to a flock of vultures).

Furthermore, the story line follows the tradition of the Passion plays rather than of the New Testament in implying the now discredited concept of Jews and "Christ-killers". Both the extent of the Priests' involvement and the degree of Pilate's innocence are carried to a degree far beyond the texts of the Gospels.

In ways like these the film contributes openly or subtly to reinforcement of negative stereotypes of Jews, and we are concerned that most of your people who see it will not identify and criticize this aspect of the film in their analyses of it -- unless you help. That help will serve not only to deepen their discussion of the film, but more importantly to improve Christian-Jewish relations.

Rufus Cornelison  
David Gracie  
Philip U. Martin  
William Ramsden  
Robert T. Strommen  
Bruce Theunissen

PUM:sk

July 18, 1973

Selma Hirsh

Gerald Strober

Universal Pictures' knowledge  
of AJC concern over Superstar

The enclosed letter from Allen Rivkin to Mort Yarmon dated October 29, 1971 is conclusive evidence that Mr. Lew Wasserman had in his possession on October 14, 1971 a copy of the American Jewish Committee analysis of the Broadway stage version of Jesus Christ Superstar.

I believe that Elmer Winter should include this information in his letter to Wasserman since it clearly indicates that Wasserman and Universal were informed of AJC's concerns only days after the Broadway production opened. It seems to me that this adds weight to our rejection of Wasserman's assertion that he was not aware of the American Jewish Committee position on Superstar.

GSS:FM  
Encl.

cc: Bert Gold  
Rabbi Marc Tanenbaum ✓  
Mort Yarmon

# JEWISH FILM ADVISORY COMMITTEE

A.26

BOX 1644 • BEVERLY HILLS • CALIF. 90213 • (213) 276-4974

*Founded in 1947, the Committee functions as an information agency servicing the creators of Hollywood motion pictures and television*

*New York City Office:*

55 WEST 42ND STREET (RM. 1530)  
NEW YORK, N.Y. 10036  
(212) 564-3450

DORE SCHARY, *Chairman*  
ALLEN RIVKIN, *Director*  
MAGGIE WEISBERG, *Associate*

October 29, 1971

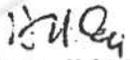
Dear Mort:

As I wrote you in my October 18 letter, on October 14 one of the American Jewish Committee officials in this town gave to the Universal hierarchy a copy of the Strober report. I am assured by a contact over there that Mr. Lew Wasserman, the head of the studio, was among those who received it. Whether he read it or not, and if he did, what his reaction was, I do not know at this writing. I mention this in answer to your query of October 26 to tell you that the Strober report will certainly be given to Norman Jewison, I am assured, when he starts working on JESUS CHRIST SUPERSTAR.

Jewison doesn't plan to start shooting in Jerusalem until next summer, and since he is only using lyrics for his script, according to a statement he made, there seems to be no hurry in putting a script together. Eventually there will have to be one for the production department, so the film can be budgeted.

Jewison says the budget will be between three and four million, but if Universal is going to make it, you can be damn sure it will be less than half that, since they are truly a cheapie outfit.

Best regards,

  
Allen Rivkin

Mr. Mort Yarmon  
American Jewish Committee  
165 E. 56th Street  
New York, NY 10022

P.S. Please have your man in Rome tell us what Zeffirelli is up to with his preparation to film what he titles "The Assassination of Christ." Primarily we need to know who is financing him.

*International*  
New York City

From  
National Jewish Post  
& Opinion  
New York, N.Y.  
W-13,000

AUG 3 1973

## Anti-Defamation League On Top Of Superstar Problems In Early 1972

Editor, POST and OPINION:

We must express concern about the inaccuracy of your July 20 editorial because of its unfair statement about the Anti-Defamation League in connection with "Jesus Christ Superstar."

Your statement that "everyone knew what was going on except... the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith" (and two other named Jewish agencies) is entirely inaccurate. The implication that ADL did nothing in the premises is similarly inaccurate.

From the very outset we were in touch with the Jewison office in an effort to effectively alert it about the pitfalls and the dangers to Jewish security implicit in a crucifixion film. In the Spring of 1972 before the film went into production, we sent Jewison a fourteen page ADL memorandum, which analyzed the libretto in historical terms, and we set forth the agency's concerns, urging "sensitivity" on the part of those responsible for the script, casting, and directing.

Mr. Jewison gave us assurances that we need have no concern about the kind of movie he would make. We had confidence in the assurances. But, having no rights of censorship, that fairly well ended what reasonably could be done by an agency such as ours. Of course, when we learned that Jewison planned to shoot the

outdoor scenes of the movie in Israel, we were in touch with appropriate contacts in that country, and we alerted them to the implicit dangers.

There is a difference between not doing something about a situation and not succeeding in the effort. Which is why your editorial was inaccurate and, therefore, unfair and unkind.

ARNOLD FORSTER  
Anti-Defamation League  
of B'nai B'rith  
315 Levington Ave.  
N.Y., N.Y. 10016

P.S. We do not speak for the other national Jewish agencies to whom your editorial similarly referred. But I think we can say that from our own knowledge that these other agencies were equally innocent of your charge of negligence.

Editor's note:

We're also happy to print the facts, but must ask why after all this publicity and all this hullabaloo and all the press releases, this information was not made public until The P-O challenged the organizations in the field of civil defense work. And if the American Jewish Committee and the American Jewish Congress are to be absorbed also by the Anti-Defamation League, why did they not make public this work of the ADL, for most surely they must have been aware of it.

In the early days of civic protective work in the United States, the ADL kept a full-time staff man in Hollywood, who not only had contacts but was as au courant on what was in the process of being made into movies as anyone else in the film capital. Why not set up a joint such office, not only for Hollywood, but for all presentation arts. The Bridget Loves Bernie episode is a case in point.

L. I. Catholic 8/9/73

# New Superstar film makes a Christian uncomfortable

By Brother Thomas Allen

In Review: Jesus Christ Superstar —A3

This big, loud, thumping rock opera studiously follows the script of the Gospel Passion Play; but it also adamantly refuses to cast the Gospel Christ.

Any basic plot premise that would gag the sweet prince in "Hamlet" or expurgate Cervantes from "Don Quixote" (as in the recent, hollow version of "Man of La Mancha") would be a dumb, silly idea, if not a thoroughly self-defeating one.

Yet Jesus Christ, The Superstar, is the passion preacher stripped of His teachings, the miracle worker stripped of His powers, the prophet stripped of His foresight, and the Son of Man stripped of His Divinity.

When the title role in the Passion Play is shackled and downgraded in such a manner, then the Christian viewer has no way of relating to the Christ figure, even when He is presented, as in this film, with the traditional Holy-picture regalia of flowing hair, soft eyes and a white robe.

The problem of identification is compounded when the minimal Christ is accurately depicted as wrangling with the Apostles outside Jerusalem, entering the gates triumphantly, cleansing the temple, officiating at the Last Supper, and is arrested, tried, scourged and crucified.

"Jesus Christ Superstar" reduces the Passion to a closed footnote in history, to the death and remembrance of a pop holy-card celebrity. In denying a religious dimension to the Gospel story, the film deduces that a 1973 Christian is the longest running celebrity chaser in history.

These attitudes in the film, of course, make me thoroughly uncomfortable as a Christian viewer. There is no way I can cope with a Christ figure who is non-divine, nor the Son of God, nor a living, regenerating force in the world today.

So I approach "Jesus Christ Superstar" gingerly, enjoy its pounding rock rhythms selectively, marvel at the many dramatic

strengths of a story whose main idea won't play, and aggressively fight the storytellers through every chapter and verse of their interpretation of the Passion Play.

**Siding with the villains:**

Probably, the most accurate reading of "Jesus Christ Superstar" is one on the level of the youthful talents that originally created it, and that would be a revamping of the Passion into a modern morality play about a pop idol who gets trapped by the unleashed, fickle, adoring fans that he has created.

On the other hand, "Superstar" offers a very accurate, verbatim reading on the establishment villains found in the real Passion Play, even if it cannot identify its hero. With literary license, "Superstar" also comes up with some very sharp interpretations of the fall guys who get squeezed between forces in the story.

Considering the sympathies of the creators, it is not surprising that the roles of Judas, Mary Magdalene, Herod, Pilate, and the Jewish priests

(Continued on Page 12)

# 'Superstar' reviewed

(Continued from Page 1)

get built up at the expense of Christ and the Apostles.

The writers of "Jesus Christ Superstar" are sharp, but men of no faith.

They spotlight each and every establishment villain of the piece right off and go on further than to quote Pontius Pilate and the temple priests verbatim from the only written texts in existence. As for King Herod, they can read between the lines and use him for kinky, burlesque comedy relief as in the Broadway version.

The portrayal of the Jewish priests — stock oily, hypocritical establishment caricatures from the expedient Watergate school — has reportedly raised a furor as a possible generating force of anti-Semitism. I find no foundation for complaints in the context of the film, however, except possible an aesthetic one in placing the singing voices of Caiaphas and Annas on both ends of the Ink Spots singing scale.

The complaint, if any, lies directly in the Passion narrative itself when it is treated historically. The film omits the controversial Matthew text in which the priests prod the people into bloodthirsty calls and the Jewish people call the blood of Jesus down upon their children. The priests deliver the J.C. figure of the film into a political gambit before Pilate, but recoil at the savagery of the scourging.

And, on another level, the complaint lies in the past, in twisted, bigotted, historical extrapolations that have fashioned from a Gospel of love a weapon of hatred.

## the Film World

by Brother Thomas Allen  
staff reviewer



Judas in the film is a black actor, but I cannot think of Carl Anderson as anything but a magnificent dramatic performer, and the Judas role would be clawed at by anyone with talent.

But the role of Judas, which is at least a sub-nova, if not a Superstar character, introduces the wildest ideas of the film. Judas is a contemporary, radical revolutionary who preaches hard-nosed ideas, but who suffers the one fatal flaw of an activist — he has a loss of commitment.

Judas also has a hit number as a Las Vegas version of Mephistopheles descending from the choirs and chorus-girls of heaven. His "Superstar" number summarizes the doctrinal shallowness of the motion picture when he accuses Christ of trading in the scourging and crucifixion for all those Christ paintings to evolve over the last twenty centuries.

Ted Neeley, a strong ethnic Irish face in the title role, is a welcome relief from the Jesus clown in "Godspell." He is only a good hippie, preaching peace and the joy of the moment, a good man of faith wracked with self-doubts, but he is a strong man. And he even gets two authentic Gospel lines about conquering death by death and about the openness of

the Kingdom to all manner of men.

Norman Jewison, a Canadian director already successful in the current field of on-location musicals, brings a strong degree of naturalism to the film. He has wrought an imposing version of great fury, an outright attempt to milk the dramatic confrontations in the passion for their most strident values.

Appropriately, the style matches the incessant aural assault on the soundtrack.

12 - 8/8/73

**"SUPERSTAR" DISCLAIMERS ASKED BY JEWISH GROUP (440)**

NEW YORK (NC)--Officials of the American Jewish Committee (AJC) have asked that the television version of the movie "Jesus Christ Superstar" include statements clearly stating it is not a "religious tract" in its portrayal of Jews as "Christ-killers."

"We're also asking that some scenes be modified," Rabbi Marc H. Tanenbaum, director of interreligious affairs department of the committee, told a news conference here as the movie opened in New York. The requests were made to Universal Pictures.

"But we have no intention of censoring the film," Rabbi Tanenbaum said. "The committee is opposed to boycotts, picketing and demonstrations because we don't feel these are effective ways to communicate our concern. They can be counterproductive."

The movie, the AJC leader said, is dangerous in its potential effect on children. The movie could also be an instrument of anti-Semitic propaganda in some countries, he said.

Nevertheless, Rabbi Tanenbaum said it will also be a springboard for a massive campaign by the AJC to tell moviegoers that it contains caricatures of Jews and blacks as well as distortions of Christian Gospel which are offensive to millions.

"We hope this will be the last gasp of this genre of Passion Play in the western world," Rabbi Tanenbaum said.

With him at the press conference were Elmer L Winter, AJC president; Leonard Yaseen, national co-chairman of the AJC interreligious affairs commission; Gerald S. Strober, Presbyterian consultant on religious education for the committee.

(MORE)

The AJC objections were the latest round of Jewish and Christian criticism of the content of the movie. A day earlier, Benjamin R. Epstein, national director of the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith, warned that the movie could lead to increased anti-Semitism.

The AJC leaders made these added points:

--For months before the play "Jesus Christ Superstar" opened in October, 1971, on Broadway and before and during its filming in Israel, they had been in correspondence with the producers and movie company officials. Their offers of information and consultation were rebuffed, they said.

--Because of objections to the movie from several Israeli government ministries, Israeli diplomats will not attend openings of "Jesus Christ Superstar" in this country.

--In addition to pressing for an explanatory prologue and epilogue when the movie is edited for television, the AJC also wants that it be clearly indicated on television that both the Second Vatican Council and the World Council of Churches officially repudiated anti-Semitism and "Christ-killer" charges against Jews.

"The fact that "Jesus Christ Superstar" uses the modern idiom and is called a "rock opera" does not change its status as a Passion Play," Winter said. "Indeed, it means that a whole new generation...is being introduced to these stereotypes about the Jewish people and religion."

Many Christian leaders, Yeseen said, feel that the movie "is anti-Christian and anti-Jewish." He cited reactions by Father C. Albert Koob, president of the National Catholic Educational Association, and Sister Margaret Ellen Traxler executive director of the National Catholic Conference on Interracial Justice.

Strober termed the movie "nothing less than a catastrophe" in its religious portrayals.

\* \* \* \*

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**"JESUS CHRIST SUPERSTAR"**

**JESUS CHRIST SUPERSTAR** is a controversial movie. It is now playing our theatre. Some of the more conservative members of our community may have some doubts. Some, perhaps, feel that it is sacrilegious. I reserved my opinion until I saw it because I, too, was skeptical.

Now that I have seen it (it's rated "G") I think it's one of the greatest motion pictures ever to play any theatre and I heartily endorse it for the appreciation of all. However, should any patron feel this picture not worth the admission, we will cheerfully give him a "raincheck" for a future movie.

It has long been a policy of our company not to exhibit offensive motion pictures. However, we have never avoided controversial subjects. **JESUS CHRIST SUPERSTAR** has been endorsed by many leading publications throughout the United States as an important motion picture... indeed, great cinema.

I invite you to be a judge. I respect the collective judgments of the various publications which have acclaimed the film, and I will most certainly respect yours.

Sumner Redstone, President  
 Redstone Theatres

...he was  
 the gangster's gangster.  
*The private life of a public enemy*



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*Cinti. Enquirer*  
 7-29-73

# NEW YORK Amsterdam News

## Black Judas Resents Role Being Mistaken For Life

*Have Tanenbaum*

What bugs Carl Anderson who plays the role of Judas in "Jesus Christ Superstar," which opened this past Wednesday at several metropolitan area theater houses is that questioners are talking about his role in the film and "turning it into a church beat and it ain't man."

In fact when the producers made the film, they probably meant it as "a social commentary based on the youth today. I don't think they had religion in mind."

Nonetheless, there has been a lot of flack about Anderson's role. Rabbi Marc

H. Tanenbaum, national director of interreligious affairs for the American Jewish Committee, said that "Jesus Christ Superstar" had received a "G" rating, which means that "masses of impressionable Christian children of Sunday school age will be exposed, in most compelling fashion, to an anti-Jewish presentation of the gospel story without the guidance of an accompanying parent."

### Black Judas

Said 28-year-old Anderson: "At first (Norman) Jewison (the director) didn't want a Black to play the role of Judas. One did, however, but Anderson wonders what the reaction would have been if Jesus had been played by a Black. Reflecting, Anderson came to the conclusion that the reaction would have been the same. He described a Black actor in a part where he acted a stereotyped buffon type role and wondered why no one had said anything about that. "They should have given that role to a nice Jewish boy from Westchester County," said Anderson.

Are Jews, as some have claimed, the real killers of Christ? "I can't say yes and I can't say no. I can't put myself in the position of speaking for Jews" and "Rabbi Tanenbaum should talk to Blacks before he goes around making statements about what's good for them."

He said that if Rabbi Tanenbaum was really concerned about "getting to the roots" of the question, he should go "and kill off the New Testament" for it is there that references are made to Jews being the killers of Christ, said Anderson.

**Wants Tanenbaum Crucified**  
"I think Tanenbaum should be crucified" said the outspoken actor. "He must have a hangup or need to have his name printed in the paper," said Anderson.

On Thursday, Anderson, who was born in Lynchburg, Va., and who graduated from Dunbar High School there, is

scheduled to leave for a five day stint with a band in Washington, D.C. After that his itinerary includes trips to Los Angeles, Calif., London, England, and Bermuda.

Most people don't get movie and stage roles as easily as Anderson got his. He was an unknown singer when he saw himself playing the role of Judas on stage. He auditioned for the road show and got the part. It was while he was in the Los Angeles production that he flew to London, England and took a screen test; ergo, Judas.

### Made In Israel

From July through November, Anderson was in Israel where the picture was made. The cast worked 14-hours a day but he had about 200 tapes which he used to unwind while drinking wine.

Anderson's idea of fun is not going to parties. What he does like to do is paint, take photographs and do interior decorating. If he is not doing any of those things, he would prefer to relax in a quiet little bar.

He said that Universal Pictures was "wrong" if it had denied the Council of Churches the opportunity to see an advance screening of "Jesus Christ Superstar" since they had let members of the American Jewish Committee do so. "I'm not going to try to defend Universal."

### Would Do It Again

And would Anderson do the role again if he had known about the recurrent flack? "Yes, indeed I would have done it for the same reason I did it the last time—it was a good role in a good production."

## Ethnic Protests

The vitality of some movies is being sapped by ethnic protests. "Jesus Christ Superstar" is drawing the ire of Jews who denounce "the negative and hostile portrayal of the Jewish people as Christ killers" and by Black Baptists who denounce the fact that Judas is portrayed by a Black.



*P. 15A - 7/24/73*  
**JESUS CHRIST SUPERSTAR:** The famed Webber-Rice rock opera is on the screen and the score has been rendered with aural magnificence. Director Norman Jewison's concept of the film is to mix the modern with the traditional. Parents should note certain liberties have been taken with traditional accounts of the Passion of Christ. For older children (Showcase).  
*Amsterdam*  
FRANK HORN: P

# 'Superstar' writers shed Bible image

BY ERNEST LEOGRANDE

Three years ago the title "Jesus Christ Superstar" seemed in poor taste, maybe even a bit blasphemous. Today it has become a household word and most responsible for its universal acceptance are the young English authors Andrew Lloyd Webber, 25, and Tim Rice, 28. The two proved that a musical and now a movie about Christ could be written without loss of dignity.

While the phenomenal success of "Jesus Christ Superstar" coincidentally parallels the growth of the Jesus Freak movement, the writers deny responsibility. Says Webber: "We don't identify with any Christian religion either, 'Superstar' was never meant to be a statement of young people's attitude on religion."

**THE WRITERS CAN** disclaim their influence, but it exists nevertheless. The original album of "Jesus Christ Superstar" has sold more than 3 million copies. There have been 14 productions of the show around the world, including the first one in New York, and one in Los Angeles, plus a touring company to present the work in concert. New record versions have been made to go with many of the productions and now the album soundtrack of the movie version has been released.

An earlier work of the writers, which preceded "Jesus Christ Superstar," is based on the Old Testament story of Joseph: "Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat." They wrote it originally, before "Superstar," for sheet music for school choirs to sing. But an expanded version was presented on the London stage this season and next fall will come to New York.

Their next project—are you ready?—will be a musical based on the P. G. Wodehouse stories about Jeeves, the british butler, immortalized in movies by actor Arthur Treacher.

"We had to choose something," Rice said.

"This will cut them away completely from the Bible image," explained their personal manager, David Land.

**THEY WILL DO** the same thing with the Jeeves show which they did with "Jesus Christ Superstar," make an album of songs before the show goes into production. This runs counter to regular practice, which calls for a show album to be issued only after the show has proved itself on stage.

Webber and Rice were so successful with "Superstar" they obviously hope lightning will strike twice.



Andrew Lloyd Webber (right) and Tim Rice, the young writers of "Jesus Christ Superstar" are planning a total departure from any religious themes in a musical they are working on now about Jeeves the butler.

The New York production had many performers wearing body mikes, which are notoriously erratic in sound and often make the singer's voice seem to be coming somewhere else rather than from his mouth.

**WEBBER SAID THE** team "actively prevented" body mikes from being used in other productions and personally oversaw the shows to make sure the sound was all right. "You just have to accept the fact that the performers have hand mikes," Webber said.

"Superstar" was so successful that they have had to contend with the sincerest form of flattery, imitation. Their lawyers have been kept busy getting injunctions against other commercial groups putting on the work without their permission.

Maybe more important, young people have become so enamored of the work it has become almost a stock item by amateur groups in churches and auditoriums, presenting it for love rather than money.

"We have turned a blind eye on most of them," Rice says. "But we never get paid out of it, you see." Webber adds on a practical note. "I suppose it does show quality wins out."

Rice, tall, fair and always smiling, writes the lyrics. Webber, slight, dark and intense, writes the music. Rice speaks jocularly ("Hello, room service? Send me up a room."), while Webber seems as if he never opens up. But when he does, watch out.

Webber speaking on the iffy prospects of a conventional musical when such shows seem to be in a decline here and in England: "Things that are good succeed."

**THEIR "DREAMCOAT"** is only an hour and 20 minutes, like "Superstar," less than ordinary stage show running time. A curtain raiser about Jacob and Esau was tacked onto it in England, against Webber and Rice's objections.

Webber: "Either 'Joseph' will come on as just 'Joseph' or it won't come at all."

Webber on the New York production of "Superstar": "It's never been possible to get the sound right. I'll never know why."

One reason is the New York production was rushed onto the stage two years ago to capitalize on the wave of interest in the record. The producers Robert Stigwood Organization, fearing the interest wouldn't last. They were wrong of course.

The haste showed, especially the tension of trying to add a visual interest through costumes and staging while trying to approximate the superb sound of the original recording, on which Webber and Rice personally had lavished so much time.

"The mixing alone of that original album took a fortnight," Webber says.