

February 23, 2012

Rabbi Marvin Hier
Founder and Dean

Rabbi Abraham Cooper
Associate Dean

Mr. Pall Magnusson, General Director
Efstaleiti 1
Reykjavik, Iceland

Dear Mr. Magnusson:

The Simon Wiesenthal Center is a leading Jewish Human Rights NGO dedicated to learning the lessons of the Nazi Holocaust and promoting tolerance and mutual respect and understanding. On behalf of our 400,000 constituent families, I am writing to you about a matter of deep distress to our community.

As you know, since 1944, the entire *Hymns of the Passion* by Hallgrímur Petursson have been broadcast by the State Broadcasting Service to the people in Iceland. We understand that one hymn is read each day for the 9-week period of Lent, and that it is considered a major honor to be asked to read one of these hymns over the air. Many of Iceland's most distinguished citizens, including the late President, Mrs. Vigdís Finnbogadóttir, have accepted the invitation with pride.

While we deeply respect the Christian faith and faithful, we feel we must express our shock over the many blatantly anti-Semitic references that pervade Petursson's Hymns. There are over 50 references to Jews, all of them negative, most of which reinforce hateful notions about Jews that laid the theological groundwork for 20 centuries of anti-Semitic hatred and persecution.

It is inconceivable that such intolerance be expressed anywhere, but even more so over the airwaves of a modern democratic nation. The fact that such anti-Semitic references are read by some of the nation's most distinguished citizens over the air serves to only reinforce hateful notions about Jews and poison new generations of impressionable young people with onerous stereotypes of Jewish cunning, treachery, and of course, the toxic charge of deicide.

We are attaching a list of the anti-Semitic references included in Petursson's Hymns. Out of a sense of deep respect, but profound urging, we ask you and other officials of the State Broadcasting Service to once and for all, eliminate them from the airwaves of the RUV. The people of Iceland and the Jewish people deserve better.

Sincerely,



Rabbi Abraham Cooper
Associate Dean

Cc: Ambassador Gudmundur Arni, Washington, DC

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Quotes from: *Hymns of the Passion*

Page 20

The Jews arrive in the Garden

*Note: (Those who come to take Jesus are the Romans, yet the title implies it is the Jews. There is no mention ever made of the Romans)

Page 26

Judas' Kiss and Christ's Arrest

It was the Jews who bound thee,
They clung like cords around thee

Page 34

Christ's address to the Jews

But not a ray of Heaven's love could pierce their self-willed
blindness

Page 64

The Soldiers mock Christ

Never an unknown man deride
Though he appear undignified.
Canst tell the butt of thine abuse
Better than did these foolish Jews?

Page 69

The Priest's Conference

Early the Jews decided
Thee, Saviour, to convict
And in their zeal misguided
Death's penalty inflict.

Page 83

The Jews' First Charge before Pilate

To enter that defiled abode
They deemed a desecration
To shed the guiltless captive's blood,
They hailed with acclamation.

The Jewish elders now present
A threefold accusation,
And charge the Saviour with intent
To lead astray the nation.

Page 86

Christ's Confession before Pilate

Hatred it was that led the Jews
The blessed Master to accuse;

To save me from the Jewish
Or remedy my captive flight

Page 91

The Jews Second Charge before Pilate

The Jews impeached Him still
Of all and every ill

Page 100

The Demand for Crucifixion

The Jewish leaders all decide
That Jesus must be crucified
The Prince of Life their prey must be
The murd'rer set at liberty

Page 111-112

Christ led from the Judgment Hall

The Jewish crowd replied
"Away with Him!" they shouted, Their enmity undoubted
"He must be crucified!"

The righteous law of Moses
The Jews here misapplied,
Which their deceit exposes,
Their hatred and their pride.

Page 120-121

Pilate and the Jews

"Away with Him!" incensed they cried,
"This culprit must be crucified!"
The Governor rightly called Thee king
The Jews Thee to the cross would bring.

Page 125

Pilate's Unjust Judgment

Upon themselves and on their seed
The burden of their dreadful deed
The Jews assumed in thoughtless rage.
It dogs their steps from age to age

Page 132

Christ bears His cross

And on the Gentiles God will pour
The boundless riches of His grace.
What the Jew foolishly forswore
He makes of us – a chosen race.

Page 149-151

The Superscription on the Cross

That all might know its meaning.
The Jews its truth would not admit,
Its message contravening.
“It must not stand!”
Was their demand,

Such honor would the Jews deny
To Jesus, Whom they hated.

Page 203

The Burial of Christ

Fearing the Jews 'harsh enmity

Page 208

The Guard on Watch

That Christ was risen the Jews denied.
The evidence they sought to hide.
But God's great wisdom could defeat
Their plan to cheat
And soon laid bare their vile deceit.