

# EVEN PLAYING DIRTY DIDN'T WORK

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"The Passion of the Christ" was not only a stunning artistic achievement for Mel Gibson, it was a great Lenten gift to Christians. But it didn't happen by chance. It happened because Mel wouldn't give up, and neither would we. But it took all we had to defeat those bent on spiking the film. They played dirty, but even that didn't work.

The attack on "The Passion of the Christ" was unprecedented in its ruthlessness. Consider the following:

- The script was stolen and given to those who could be counted on to slam it.
- Tapes of the film were stolen and distributed to those who also could be relied upon to bash it.
- Mel's faith was impugned.
- Charges that violence against Jews would occur after the movie was shown were commonplace.
- Accusations of anti-Semitism were thrown around with abandon.
- Attempts to bully Gibson into changing the film were ongoing.
- Demands for a postscript were made by those who sought to put Gibson on the defensive.
- Bishops were badgered to get Mel's friends

in line.

- The Vatican was lobbied to criticize the movie.
- Vatican sources were pressured into saying the pope didn't say of the film, "It is as it was."
- Accusations that the movie was being kept away from Jewish neighborhoods were made.
- Fears that the movie might damage youngsters who saw it were expressed.
- Demands that Gibson vet his script for approval to officials of the Catholic Church were constantly made.
- Attempts to discredit the film were made by those who said it wasn't authentic, including by those who had no problem with the wildly inaccurate movie, "The Last Temptation of Christ."
- Critics deceitfully gained admission into screenings of the film.
- Highly personal questions about Gibson's life were raised.
- Sneering comments that the film might make a profit were voiced.
- The way the movie was marketed was raised in a derisive way.
- Demands that the film be censored were made at public rallies.
- Catholics who defended the movie were

insulted by foes of the film.

- Bishops were pressured to denounce the movie as being unfaithful to Church's teachings.
- Disrespect for Gibson's artistic rights were evidenced over and over.
- Mel's 85-year-old father was attacked even though he had nothing to do with the movie.
- Police detectives were ordered into theaters to assess whether the movie might promote violence against Jews.

Besides the dirty play, there was also the double standard; never was it more obvious. Every time the Catholic League has complained about an offensive movie, we've been told to lighten up—it's just a film. Every time we've complained about an offensive artistic exhibit, we've been told not to go see it. Every time we've complained about an offensive TV show, we've been told to simply change the channel. But when it comes to movies, exhibits, and TV shows that our foes find offensive—including nativity scenes on public property—then all of a sudden there is a direct cause and effect relationship at work that merits the attention of Washington.

Nothing demonstrated the pure hypocrisy of our critics more than their passivity to the story in the *New York Post* that told how 20 detectives of the NYPD were ordered into the theaters to monitor the movie. Had this been an alleged anti-Catholic film they were asked to check out, all hell would have broken loose.

It gets better. When a Jewish woman from the New York Civil Liberties Union called me to learn why she had been sent a copy of our news release on this issue, she seemed slightly amused to hear me warn of the "chilling effect" that such a

police action might have on free speech. She begrudgingly acknowledged that I had a point, but she also said it was proper for the police to assess whether the film might promote violence against Jews. Now if she had learned that the cops were checking to see if "Schindler's List" might provoke hate crimes against German Americans, is there any doubt that her calls of fascism would have been heard in Munich?

But as I said, even though they played dirty, they still lost. And that's something we can all relish.