

FOES OF "THE PASSION" CRACKING UP

Catholic League president William Donohue commented today on the way some critics of "The Passion of the Christ" are behaving:

"With the opening of 'The Passion of the Christ' less than a week away, it is obvious that some of the film's critics are cracking up. For example, gossip maven Liz Smith today echoes ADL chief Abe Foxman's remark that Mel Gibson is a 'true believer.' Ex-priest John Dominic Crossan accuses Mel of 'playing with dynamite,' offering that the film is 'dangerously irresponsible.' Bart Charlow, director of the National Conference for Community and Justice, says Mel is 'treading on ancient and dangerous grounds,' adding that it may lead to 'synagogue firebombings.' Rabbi James Rudin of the American Jewish Committee is upset about a scene in which Jesus is hung over a bridge by chains; Rudin says this wasn't in the New Testament. Abe Foxman says the movie betrays Vatican II and that the Church has 'a responsibility to stand up to defend its own teaching.' And several media talk-show hosts have grilled me about the propriety of young people seeing a movie with so much violence.

"The term 'true believer' was coined by philosopher Eric Hoffer to describe fanatics, both religious and secular. In other words, it accurately describes Mel's most extreme critics. Those who are sounding the alarms over anti-Semitic violence are historically ignorant: the last time Jews were assaulted after the production of a Passion Play was in the Middle Ages. As for fidelity to the New Testament, Mel is not obligated to tailor his interpretation of the Bible according to someone else's politically correct straightjacket. If they don't like his version, they can always make their own. Moreover, it takeschutzpah for a non-

Catholic to lecture the Church about defending its teachings, simply because he doesn't like a movie the Church had nothing to do with. As for the violence, it is amazing to hear those who think it's okay for a teenager to submit her unborn child to lethal violence—without parental consent—now worry whether she is able to endure a movie about the death of Jesus.

“These critics are cracking up. But their demagoguery is failing: they cannot stop the movie from being a blockbuster.”