

GIBSON'S CRITICS GET HYSTERICAL

On August 28, New York State Assemblyman Dov Hikind held a press conference outside Fox News Corp. headquarters demanding that 20th Century Fox not distribute Mel Gibson's film "The Passion."

Hikind, who never saw the movie, asserted that the film "resurrects the age-old canard of deicide," flouting the Vatican's 1965 declaration *Nostra Aetate*, which denied that all Jewish people were responsible for the death of Jesus. He has also charged that the film "can incite anti-Semitic violence."

William Donohue wasn't too happy and decided to contact the media about his concerns. "The furor over Mel Gibson's film has now reached a fever pitch," he charged. "Assemblyman Hikind's response," Donohue said, "is an example of how reaction to 'The Passion' has spilled into hysteria."

In a press statement, Assemblyman Hikind alleged that the movie implicates all Jews in the Crucifixion, a common misconception of those who haven't seen the movie. In fact, absolutely nothing in the film is inconsistent with *Nostra Aetate*, which repudiated the idea of collective guilt of the Jewish people for Jesus' death.

Donohue flatly responded, "The contention that the film 'will spur anti-Semitic fervor' is nonsense." Donohue pointed out that Jack Valenti, president of the Motion Picture Association of America, after seeing the film, commented, "You can quote me—Mel Gibson's 'The Passion' is not anti-Semitic. I did not see any anti-Semitism in it."

If the Catholic League for one moment thought that the movie would inspire anti-Semitism, we would condemn the movie.

Indeed, just last year, the league joined with Dov Hikind and other Jews in calling for a boycott of New York's Jewish Museum, which exhibited art that trivialized the Holocaust.

"Having seen the movie twice," Donohue commented, "I agree with the hundreds of Catholics, Protestants, and Jews who have now seen 'The Passion.' It is near unanimous: this movie will not foment anti-Semitism. Any such blind charges are vacuous."

A few dozen Jews joined Assemblyman Hikind at his press conference. Donohue showed up as well. Before anything got under way, Donohue and Hikind shook hands. Hikind, who had seen Donohue's response to his news release, said to the Catholic League president, "You're a friend." Donohue tried to convince the assemblyman that the movie was not anti-Semitic.

When the press conference began, Hikind was joined by three other Jewish politicians from New York. Protesters held signs condemning the film but everyone was peaceful. Some of the remarks were moderate in tone while others were quite severe. "Throughout history," Hikind told the crowd, "the week leading up to Easter was one of the most dangerous for Jews, because the rabble had been stirred up by passion plays which portrayed hooked-nose Jews clamoring for Jesus' death."

Hikind asked all "New Yorkers to join me in calling on News Corporation to reject Mel Gibson's depiction of Jews as killers. 'The Passion' in its current form will spur anti-Semitic fervor." City Councilman Simcha Felder said it appeared that Gibson had a passion for inciting hatred and bigotry; it was his wish that the film go straight to video stores and bypass theaters. Shulamit Hawtof, a Jewish administrative assistant from Brooklyn, didn't even want the movie to go direct to video. "I would like to see it buried, frankly," she said.

Malka Moskowitz, the elderly woman in the picture holding the sign, is a Holocaust survivor who claimed that the atmosphere

surrounding the movie reminded her of the Third Reich. "This is the way it started," she said.

When the press conference was over, reporters who know Donohue spotted him and asked him a series of questions. He was surrounded by a circle of Jewish protesters, most of whom listened attentively as Donohue presented them with a question and answer: "Who does the Crucifixion? It's all the Romans!"

Things got tense when a rabbi from Brooklyn charged that the story of the Passion was pornographic. When Donohue asked him if he was saying the Gospels were pornographic, he backed down. But then the rabbi told Donohue that he would hold him personally responsible if violence broke out. Donohue responded by saying, "I'll be no more responsible than if violence broke out against Germans after you show a film on the Holocaust."

Donohue then challenged the crowd that had gathered to put in writing what part of the Mel Gibson movie was historically inaccurate and then send it to him. He was greeted with silence.

Those opposed to the film say they will continue their protest over the next several months. This doesn't bother the Catholic League. We will confront Gibson's critics whenever and wherever they appear.

What is driving much of the antipathy against Gibson is the fact that he is a very traditional Catholic. It is not just secular elites who are overreacting, Catholics who fancy themselves as progressive are just as guilty. They are not interested in granting Gibson a fair hearing—they are literally out to destroy his career. We have pledged to see to it that they fail.



Dr. Donohue answers reporters' questions about Mel Gibson's upcoming film.



A protester outside the News Corporation offices holds a sign that reads, "THE PASSION IS A LETHAL WEAPON AGAINST JEWS."

Photos by Alex Mejia