

MEL GIBSON'S FOES OVERHEAT; SMEAR CAMPAIGN BACKFIRES

Critics of Mel Gibson's film, "The Passion of Christ," are becoming unhinged, but their smear campaign is backfiring.

For example, on November 6, the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) convened its 90th Annual National Meeting at New York's Plaza Hotel. One of the sessions explored the controversy over the film.

Paula Fredriksen, professor of theology at Boston University, commented that the movie was "inflammatory," saying it was in the "toxic tradition of blaming Jews for the death of Jesus." She also predicted that the film "could very possibly elicit violence against Jews." Fredriksen has not seen the movie.

Sister Mary C. Boys, professor of Judeo-Christian Studies, Union Theological Seminary, ridiculed Gibson for saying he believed he was guided by the Holy Spirit in making the movie. "I don't believe that [given the divisive result] that he could claim that the Holy Spirit is behind this." Boys has not seen the movie.

Abraham H. Foxman, the ADL's national director, said Gibson was riddled with prejudice: "I think he's infected—seriously infected—with some very, very serious anti-Semitic views." Foxman has not seen the movie.

The only ADL official to see the movie is Rabbi Eugene Korn. Almost alone in his critical view of the film, Korn nonetheless couldn't stomach the overheated style of Foxman. So he quit. His resignation comes at a time when many Jewish leaders are questioning the ADL's strategy.

Elan Steinberg, an official of the World Jewish Congress, openly wondered whether Jews were alienating "those who are

our allies in many struggles.” Gilbert Rosenthal of the National Council of Synagogues also said the ADL’s approach was backfiring. Rabbi Michael Cook, a Hebrew Union professor, warned that Jews who are predicting violence following the film “risk embarrassment when it hits the theaters.”

Other Jewish critics of the ADL’s strong-armed approach include Rabbi Yechiel Eckstein, president of the International Fellowship of Christians and Jews, and Rabbi Daniel Lapin of Toward Tradition.

Orthodox Jewish film critic Michael Medved said it best when he accused Foxman of “marginalizing himself.” Medved really unloaded when he commented that Foxman’s campaign “is provoking far more anti-Semitism than the movie itself ever could.”

This is what happens when an advocacy campaign overheats. The Catholic League, of course, not only issues statements of support for Mel Gibson, we publicly chastise his harshest critics