

MEL GIBSON'S "THE PASSION" COMES UNDER FIRE

Actor Mel Gibson is spending \$25 million of his own money to finance a movie about the last 12 hours of Christ's life. "The Passion" will open during Lent next March or April. It has already come under fire for being allegedly anti-Semitic. Curiously, only those who have not seen the movie are making this charge.

Leading the fight against Mel Gibson has been a group of Catholic scholars and the ADL. None of them has seen the film, but this doesn't matter—they have condemned it for being anti-Semitic anyway. On what basis? On the basis of a stolen script.

The Catholic scholars are Sister Mary C. Boys of Union Theological Seminary; Philip Cunningham of Boston College; Eugene Fisher of the Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB); Paula Fredriksen of Boston University; and Rev. John T. Pawlikowski.

These scholars were mentioned in the press as being an official committee of the USCCB. Not only is this false—they are an ad hoc committee that has no official status—the USCCB had to issue an apology to Mel Gibson for their misdeeds.

On June 11, William Donohue debated Rabbi Marvin Hier of the Simon Wiesenthal Institute on MSNBC over the controversy surrounding Mel Gibson's film. Donohue defended Gibson and the New Testament's account of the death of Jesus. Gibson saw Donohue on TV and subsequently called to thank him.

On Sunday, July 6, Gibson met Donohue in the Catholic League's headquarters. He showed a VHS tape of the movie to Donohue, Father Philip Eichner, chairman of the league's board of

directors, and Bernadette Brady, vice president of the Catholic League. Gibson also joined the Catholic League. On July 22, Gibson showed the film to about 20 New Yorkers; at his invitation, Donohue saw it again, this time with Louis Giovino, the league's director of communications.

Gibson has allowed a select group of Catholics, Protestants, Orthodox Christians and Jews to preview the movie. The reaction has been virtually unanimous: this is the most powerful portrayal of the life and death of Jesus ever made. And it is anything but anti-Semitic.

This is going to be a protracted battle and the Catholic League is going to play a major role. We are answering every unfair attack on Mel Gibson; we will yield to no one.