

POLITICS AND SPIN OVER "THE PASSION"

Catholic League president William Donohue issued the following statement today on the latest controversy surrounding the Mel Gibson film, "The Passion of the Christ":

"Never has there been such an unseemly campaign to discredit a film of such epic proportions. The guilty include journalists, Catholic and Jewish theologians and Jewish activists. Their goal all along has been to portray Mel Gibson as a retro-Catholic anti-Semite, and to upend his film with charges of violence in the streets. But their relentless campaign is ultimately futile: at the end of the day, the people will judge the movie. And they will also judge Gibson's foes for what they have sought to do.

"It was reported last month that the pope, after seeing the film, commented, 'It is as it was.' That is when the campaign to discredit the movie went into high gear, pulling out all the stops. The result being that we are now supposed to believe that the pope watched 'The Passion' but had nothing to say about it because 'It is common practice of the Holy Father not to express public opinions on artistic works....' Yet in 1999 the Holy Father released a list of his top-45 favorite movies, among them being such interesting choices as Pier Paolo Pasolini's 'The Gospel According to St. Matthew' (number 2) and Franco Zeffirelli's 'Jesus of Nazareth' (number 5).

"There is little doubt the words, 'It is as it was,' are exactly what the pope said. There is also little doubt that some Vatican officials now think it better to keep the pope out of the controversy.

"The following is from the Catholic Catechism: 'The historical complexity of Jesus' trial is apparent in the Gospel accounts. The personal sin of the participants (Judas, the Sanhedrin, Pilate) is known to God alone. Hence we cannot lay responsibility for the trial of Jesus in Jerusalem as a whole, despite the outcry of a manipulated crowd and the global reproaches contained in the apostles' calls to conversion after Pentecost.' Nothing in the movie contradicts this interpretation and that is why it is so scurrilous for anyone to suggest otherwise."