

# REPORTS ON PRIESTLY SEXUAL ABUSE WELCOMED

Catholic League president William Donohue offered the following remarks today on the two studies that were released regarding the problem of priestly sexual abuse:

“The researchers at John Jay did a fine job. But it is the men and women of the National Review Board that deserve the plaudits of all Catholics: they had the courage to speak honestly about the scandal.

“In many ways, the National Review Board’s report vindicates what we have been saying for the past two years. The report notes that the scandal began in the late 1960s and trailed off considerably after 1984. This coincides with the onset of the sexual revolution and its waning after AIDS was discovered in 1981.

“We have also been saying that enabling bishops, ensconced in a culture of clericalism, and molesting priests, most of whom are homosexuals, are the central players in the scandal. The review board cited episcopal clericalism as contributing to ‘a culture of secrecy,’ and it noted that 81 percent of the victims were male, most of whom were postpubescent: ‘we must call attention to the homosexual behavior that characterized the vast majority of the cases of abuse observed in recent decades.’ The board correctly stressed that ‘there are many chaste and holy homosexual priests who are faithful to their vows of celibacy.’ This is exactly what we have been saying all along: while most gay priests are not molesters, most of the molesters are gay. Unfortunately, many continue to live in a world of denial about this issue.

“The lawyers and psychologists who gave advice to the bishops are correctly blamed by the report. Indeed, the psychologists

still recommend keeping molesters in the priesthood! They should be shown the gate immediately.

“The report also says that ‘the smoke of Satan’ entered the Church. This is exactly what Pope Paul VI said in 1972. While non-believers will scoff at this observation, sensible Catholics know it to be true.”

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## SAINT MEL

Catholic League president William Donohue commented today on the reaction to “The Passion of the Christ”:

“We are at a cultural tipping point. Never has the division between the elites and the masses been more evident. Many good things are happening: the smack-in-the-face that the public awarded Janet Jackson and Justin Timberlake; the public revulsion to the anti-marriage campaign; the firing of Howard Stern from many radio outlets; and, most of all, the public’s embrace of ‘The Passion of the Christ.’

“Saint Mel. That’s what he is in the eyes of millions of Americans. But for some, he’s Satan. Leon Wieseltier, the big fan of the Catholic-bashing writer Daniel Jonah Goldhagen, labels the movie a ‘sacred snuff film.’ Ex-Catholics like Maureen Dowd not only mistake the sacred for the profane, they think the film engenders intolerance when, in fact, the intolerance has come almost exclusively from the movie’s most vociferous critics.

“But this is good—the pus has come to the surface. Now we can get on with the real debate: should the culture continue its celebration of self-indulgence or repair to a culture of restraint? If the latter is to be achieved, believing

Christians, Jews and Muslims will have to join together to defeat those whose concept of liberty is pure libertinism.

“Already, left-wing censors in Hollywood are out to get Mel. They think they can stop him. But it’s too late for the blacklisters to win. Nothing can stop the public from rallying around Saint Mel.”

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## **PRESS CONFERENCE FOLLOWS OPENING OF “THE PASSION OF THE CHRIST”**

On February 25, a press conference will be held following the opening of “The Passion of the Christ.” Representatives from the New York Board of Rabbis and the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights will be there. They will be at the noon screening at the UA theater on 64<sup>th</sup> Street and 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue in Manhattan; the press conference will follow outside the theater at approximately 2:30 p.m.

Rabbi Joseph Potasnik, who leads the New York Board of Rabbis, will be in attendance. From the Catholic League, William Donohue, president of the organization will be there, along with Father Philip Eichner, chairman of the league’s board of directors. Father Paul Keenan of the New York Archdiocese’s Department of Communications, and Msgr. John Woolsey, pastor of St. John the Martyr in Manhattan, will be there as well.

The purpose of the press conference is to air any disagreements about the movie that may be necessary, and to

express a common interest in maintaining friendly relations among all parties.

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## **“PASSION” CRITICS EVINCE NEW PURITANISM**

Catholic League president William Donohue commented today on how film critics of “The Passion of the Christ” are reacting to the movie:

“Having failed to tag the movie as anti-Semitic, those who hate everything about Mel’s masterpiece are trying to convince the public not to see it because it’s too violent. Alas, there is a New Puritanism in the land. Violence has now joined cigarettes as the new taboo.

“But as it turns out, violence, like cholesterol, can be both good and bad. Consider New York *Daily News* reporter Jami Bernard. She voted the super-violent flick, ‘Gladiator,’ best picture for the year 2000. But she brands Mel’s film, ‘a compendium of tortures that would horrify the regulars at an S&M club.’ Yet she is a big fan of the Marquis de Sade—the pervert who wrote the book on S&M—and that is why she liked ‘Quills.’ Peter Rainer also condemns Mel’s movie for delving into ‘the realm of sadomasochism.’ Yet he commended Spielberg for the ‘gentleness’ he brought to ‘Saving Private Ryan.’

“Richard Corliss of *Time* thinks the only people who will be drawn to ‘The Passion’ are those ‘who can stand to be grossed out as they are edified.’ Yet he calls the ‘body halvings, decapitations, [and] unhandings’ of ‘Gladiator’ a ‘pleasure that we get to watch.’ *Newsweek*’s David Ansen says Mel’s film will ‘inspire nightmares,’ though he hails as ‘a must-see’

movie a flick about incest ('The Dreamers'). David Denby of the *New Yorker* cites 'The Passion' as being so violent it 'falls into the danger of altering Jesus' message of love into one of hate.' This is the same guy who said of 'Schindler's List' that 'the violence [is] neither exaggerated nor minimized.'

"The New Puritans will not win this one. The public does not share their deep-seated aversion to religion nor their phony pacifism.

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## **BUSH EFFORT TO BAN GAY MARRIAGE WELCOMED**

President George W. Bush today declared his support for a constitutional amendment that would ban homosexual marriages. William Donohue, president of the Catholic League, praised the president for his decision:

"President Bush did the right thing by supporting a constitutional amendment to ban marriage between two men or two women. Just last week, he discussed this issue with 13 Catholics in the Roosevelt Room of the White House; I was privileged to be there. He announced from the same room today that he has reached a decision.

"It was the collapse of the democratic process that finally forced his hand. For example, the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court recently defied its mandate to interpret state law, electing instead to issue an edict demanding homosexual marriages. In addition, the mayor of San Francisco has taken the law into his own hands: his authorization of marriage licenses to lesbians and gay men is not in his purview.

Therefore, nothing short of a constitutional amendment can stop the tyrannical stampede toward gay marriage.

“The anti-marriage campaign that gay activists have unleashed is backfiring. For the good of children, it must. Marriage is not only about love, it is about a particular structure and a particular function: the structure is one man and one woman; the function is procreation. Nature, not law, denies this opportunity to homosexuals. If marriage were only about love, incest and polygamy would be permitted. It is time we got back to basics. What is needed is a college course called ‘Common Sense 101.’ But it must be taught by men and women in the community—chosen by lottery—not by professors. Unfortunately, too many of the latter have already proven to be deficient in the property of common sense, thus making them ineligible to teach that which they do not possess.

“The Catholic League anxiously awaits what the Catholic candidate for the presidency is going to do. The ball is in John Kerry’s court.”

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## **“THE PASSION” WOUNDS THEOLOGIAN’S EGOS**

Catholic League president William Donohue issued the following statement today on the wounded egos of theologians opposed to the Mel Gibson film, “The Passion of the Christ”:

“It’s been going on for some time now, but over the weekend it really broke loose: Catholic, Protestant and Jewish theologians are irate over ‘The Passion of the Christ.’ Having spent their entire adult lives studying the Bible, and having concluded they really don’t know very much about their

subject (no argument there), they're angry at Mel because he pays them no respect. More important, why are they angry with Mel for giving us his version of what happened when they confess they don't know what happened? How can his portrayal be inauthentic if they don't know what is authentic?

"Susan B. Thistlethwaite is president of the Chicago Theological Seminary. Marvin Meyer is a professor at Chapman University. Amy-Jill Levine is professor of New Testament studies at Vanderbilt Divinity School. Ex-priest John Dominic Crossan is a DePaul University professor emeritus. Zsuzsanna Ozsváth teaches Holocaust studies at the University of Texas at Dallas. Michael Evans is the head of the Jerusalem Prayer Team. Susan Bond is a Vanderbilt Divinity School professor. Stephen Prothero teaches at Boston University. Philip Cunningham is a theology professor at Boston College. Over the weekend, they made it clear that they don't like the movie because, they say, it doesn't conform to their understanding of Christ's death. How unfortunate.

"What's driving the 'experts' mad is the realization that all their books, articles and lectures put together cannot compare to the influence that Mel's film will have on people all over the world. Their frail egos have been wounded. Even annihilated. Time for them to repair to the sanctity of their library carrel and contemplate starting over. It's never too late to admit failure and start on the long journey back. To Truth."

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## ATTACKING MEL'S DAD

Catholic League president William Donohue commented today on news reports regarding an interview that Mel Gibson's father

granted to a radio show:

"The attack on 'The Passion of the Christ' is unprecedented in its ruthlessness. The script was stolen and given to those who could be counted on to slam it; tapes of the film were stolen and distributed to those who also could be relied upon to bash it; Mel's faith has been impugned; charges that violence against Jews will occur after the movie has been shown are commonplace; attempts to bully Gibson into changing the film have been ongoing; demands for a postscript have been made by those who seek to put Gibson on the defensive; bishops have been badgered to get Mel's friends in line; the Vatican has been lobbied to criticize the movie; accusations that the movie is being kept away from Jewish neighborhoods have been made; fears that the movie will damage youngsters who see it have been expressed; demands that Gibson vet his script for approval to officials of the Catholic Church have frequently been made; critics have deceitfully gained admission into screenings of the film; highly personal questions about Gibson's life have been raised; sneering comments that the film may make a profit have been voiced; the way the movie has been marketed has been raised in a derisive way; demands that the film be censored have been made at public rallies; Catholics who defend the movie have been insulted by foes of the film; disrespect for Gibson's artistic rights has been voiced many times; and so on.

"Now they're going after Mel's 85-year-old father. As I have already told reporters, I will have none of it. The search-and-destroy operation being conducted by the movie's critics knows no boundaries. Make no mistake about it, those obsessed with killing this movie will not manipulate Bill Donohue into berating Hutton Gibson. Nor will they push me to ask for information on how I can contact their fathers, though the thought is tempting."

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# 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."

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## **JUDGE RULES AGAINST NATIVITY IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

U.S. District Court Judge Charles Sifton ruled against the plaintiffs today in the discrimination suit against the New York City Department of Education's policy regarding "Holiday Displays": the policy allows the Jewish menorah and Islamic star and crescent while banning the Christian symbol, the nativity scene. The Catholic League arranged for the Thomas More Law Center to file the suit in December 2002 on behalf of a Queens mother and her two children.

Sifton ruled that the policy is not unconstitutional and does not discriminate against Christians. In his decision he wrote that the policy is secular in intent—the menorah and star and crescent have a secular dimension while the nativity scene is "purely religious." Elsewhere he writes that the holiday displays "must be reviewed as perceived by the children, Christian children in particular, but not one hyper-sensitive

Catholic child.” The Thomas More Center will appeal this decision.

Catholic League president William Donohue spoke to this issue today:

“The Jewish menorah represents a miracle. When last we checked, miracles were considered religious. To say that it is a secular symbol is insulting to religious Jews. And to continue to say that other religions are allowed their religious symbols for display in schools, while Christians are not, promotes one religion over another.

“For the judge to say that the displays should not be viewed through the eyes of “one hyper-sensitive Catholic child” smacks of an incredible insensitivity not only to the child but to all Christians. Does the judge have an emotional barometer to measure sensitivity? This has nothing to do with constitutional law.

“If the situation were reversed and the schools allowed a nativity scene and a dreidel—but not a menorah—would Judge Sifton call those Jews who would rightly protest this ‘hyper-sensitive’? If anyone is ‘hyper-sensitive’ it is the multi-cultural censors and diversity police who are offended by the mere sight of the Baby Jesus.”

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## **ABE FOXMAN NEEDS A REALITY CHECK**

Abraham Foxman, national director of the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), met with Vatican officials yesterday. He urged them to tell bishops around the world to instruct Catholics

that Mel Gibson's upcoming movie, "The Passion of the Christ," is "Mel Gibson's version of the gospel," and not "the gospel truth." Foxman described the film as "the old medieval classical interpretation of deicide, which blames the Jews, and it will be seen by millions of viewers." He asked the Church "to stand up to defend its teachings."

Catholic League president William Donohue addressed this issue today:

"Abe Foxman needs a reality check. He obviously does not understand that this is the 21<sup>st</sup> Century and not the Middle Ages. He is demanding that the Church issue warnings about Gibson's movie because he thinks it resurrects the old deicide charge—a charge that he has said may provoke violence against Jews. But the last time Jews were assaulted following a Passion Play was during the Middle Ages. Today, Jews and Christians enjoy a close friendship. And in no place have Jews lived in greater peace and harmony with Christians than in the United States.

"There is real danger in the world for Jews, and it comes from fanatical secularists and fanatical Muslims in the Middle East. They don't need a movie to inflame their hatred, and this movie wouldn't do it anyway. By overreaching in his criticism of a movie, Foxman runs the risk of trivializing the very real dangers of anti-Semitism.

"Foxman first worked with a stolen script, saw the movie by stealth and then asked for a postscript to the film when his attempts to dictate the film's content were rebuffed. He has now gone to the Vatican to demand the Church issue warnings about the film. Foxman's unprecedented meddling in a movie that speaks so powerfully to Christians may only serve—as Michael Medved has suggested—to feed anti-Semitism."