

# MEDIA SPIN OVER “THE PASSION”

Here is what Catholic League president William Donohue said today about the way the media are spinning the furor over “The Passion of the Christ”:

“In today’s *Los Angeles Times*, it says there are ‘some conservative Catholics’ who like ‘The Passion.’ The next sentence describes me as the ‘president of the conservative Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights.’ This, I guess, is an improvement over what happened on January 24 when the *Los Angeles Times* called us ‘the conservative Catholic League (which is not affiliated with the Roman Catholic Church).’ Really? Yet we are listed in the *Official Catholic Directory*, and our brochure lists endorsements from Cardinal Mahony, Cardinal Egan, Archbishop Chaput, Archbishop O’Malley and Father Benedict Groeschel. Not exactly what one would expect from a schismatic group.

“The ADL is leading the fight against the movie. But no one in the secular media calls it the ‘liberal ADL’ when writing about its objections. Indeed, a Nexis search of U.S. news for all available dates for the term ‘conservative Catholic League’ turns up 136 hits (135 of which have come since I began as president in 1993); the number of times the ADL has been called the ‘liberal ADL’ is zero. This is called being neutral.

“A.O. Scott in today’s *New York Times* lists three anti-Christian movies, ‘Hail Mary,’ ‘Last Temptation of Christ’ and ‘Dogma.’ Not only does Scott refuse to call them anti-Christian, he says there was ‘an ugly undercurrent of anti-Semitism [that] ran through some of the attacks on those *supposedly sacrilegious movies*.’ Scott also says that anti-Semitic ‘insinuations bubble beneath the surface of some of the defenses of Mr. Gibson’s *reportedly pious picture*.’ (Twice my emphasis.)

“In short, there are no liberal critics of ‘The Passion’; there are only ‘conservatives’ who like it. Similarly, those who complain about anti-Christian films are anti-Semitic, and those who like good Christian films are also anti-Semitic. The upshot is that most Americans are anti-Semitic. Either that or those who hate Christians have no problem getting a job in the media.”

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## HOLLYWOOD PLAY ATTACKS GAY PRIESTS

“A Comfortable Truth: The Story of a Boy and His Priest” opened January 24 in the West Hollywood Lee Strasberg Creative Center; it runs through February 22. The play’s website says the work addresses “the controversial subject of juvenile molestation in the Church.”

Written and directed by Mark Kemble, and produced by David Lee Strasberg, the play was reviewed favorably by Joel Hirschhorn in *Daily Variety*. Hirschhorn credits the actor who plays the boy for delivering “each church-crucifying zinger masterfully,” and takes particular note of the scene where the boy screams “eat my brains.” To demonstrate that the boy has been traumatized by the molesting priest, the kid is depicted playing in a rock group by the name “Fourth Reich Vatican Nazis.” Thus do Kemble and Strasberg take another shot at the Catholic Church.

William Lobdell of the *Los Angeles Times* said, “The play’s set looks like a cross between a church and a bombed out train station with a few religious icons, including a busted Madonna fallen to the floor...a crucifix disguised as a piece of

junk—scraps of wood and metal topped by an upside-down milk pail with the spout serving as Christ's nose."

Here's what Catholic League president William Donohue said about it:

"When asked about his work, Mark Kemble said the play was about 'the danger of blind faith in the leaders of any religious organization.' But this is not true—there is no disparagement of any religion save Catholicism. Of the homosexual scandal in the Church, he says, 'I don't think it's an aberration.' Nor do I think it's an aberration that the people responsible for this play are from Hollywood.

"In a time when Catholic and Jewish elites are about to suffer cardiac arrest over Mel Gibson's film, it is instructive to note that none has said a word about this portrayal of a gay molesting priest. Nor will they—they are too busy instructing Mel how to portray Jews in 'The Passion.'"

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## DEMAND FOR "THE PASSION" TICKETS EXPLODES

Catholic League president William Donohue released the following comments today on ticket sales for "The Passion of the Christ":

"On p. 2 of the current edition of our monthly journal, *Catalyst*, we invite Catholic League members to buy advance tickets to 'The Passion of the Christ.' We bought 1200 tickets and are subsidizing the cost, charging only \$5 a piece. In two days we were sold out. Now we are buying thousands more.\*

“People are calling all day long, beginning as soon as I arrive in the office. I’ve never seen anything like it. Many thanks to the ad hoc committee of Catholic and Jewish theologians who blasted the movie after reading a stolen copy of the script, as well as to the ADL, the Simon Wiesenthal Center and all the other critics who have given the film such unprecedented publicity. Their motives may be ignoble, but the consequences of their action are nonetheless meritorious. We surely won’t forget them.”

\* The Catholic League purchased the tickets mentioned above to meet the overwhelming requests the league has already received; new orders for tickets should be placed through [PassionTickets.net](http://PassionTickets.net).

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## CRITICS OF “THE PASSION” PLAY DIRTY

Catholic League president William Donohue spoke today about some of the critics of the Mel Gibson movie, “The Passion of the Christ”:

“It is one thing to criticize a movie, quite another to engage in vicious *ad hominem* attacks on the person behind the film. To be specific, Rabbi Marvin Hier of the Simon Wiesenthal Center is quoted in today’s *Daily Variety* saying that ‘No responsible Jew has made the accusation that Gibson is an anti-Semite.’ Wrong. On September 19, Abraham Foxman, national director of the ADL, said Gibson is ‘painting a portrait of an anti-Semite.’ On the same day Foxman added that Gibson ‘entertains views that can only be described as anti-Semitic.’ And on November 7, Foxman said the following:

'I think he's infected—seriously infected—with some very, very serious anti-Semitic views...[Gibson's] got classical anti-Semitic views.' Sounds like an indictment to us.

"Then there are the smear merchants who attack Mel's father. In an interview that appeared last March in the *New York Times Magazine*, Hutton Gibson questioned the figure of 6 million Jews killed in the Holocaust, something many Jewish scholars have done. He did not *deny* the Holocaust, though it has often been reported that way. But why do the comments of a man who is in his mid-80s, and who has nothing to do with the film, matter so much? Unless, of course, the name of the game is to brand both Mel and his father as bigots. Even as recently as January 23, we were questioned by a producer at CBS about Mel's father. We were asked whether he is a Holocaust denier; what his reaction to the film is; and whether he is a member of the Catholic League.

"And consider this: when Rabbi Hier was asked on MSNBC to comment on the film, he directed his comments at Mel, not the movie. Referring to the *Times Magazine* piece, he said, 'Gibson made it very clear that he wants to go back to the good old days, before, he says, the Catholic Church was spoiled by Vatican II.' In short, beware of Latin Mass Catholics—they don't like Jews.

"This movie should be subjected to the same kind of artistic scrutiny that accompanies any film. But the *ad hominem* attacks must stop."

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## ADL INSULTS CHRISTIANS OVER

# MEL GIBSON FILM; APOLOGY REQUESTED

The following letter was faxed to ADL National Director  
Abraham Foxman on January 26, 2004:

Mr. Abraham Foxman  
National Director  
ADL  
823 United Nations Plaza  
New York, New York 10017

Dear Mr. Foxman:

Regarding the Mel Gibson movie, "The Passion of the Christ," you were quoted on January 23 in the *Los Angeles Times* saying, "[Gibson is] hawking it on a commercial crusade to the churches of this country. That's what makes it dangerous."

This is very disturbing. To say the film is dangerous because the people who are previewing it are church-going Christians is an insult to practicing Christians. The subtext of this remark is that church-going Christians are latent anti-Semitic bigots ready to lash out at Jews at any given moment.

As president of the nation's largest Catholic civil rights organization, I am requesting that you make a public apology immediately. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

William A. Donohue, Ph.D.  
President

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# **“THE EARLY SHOW” DISTORTS MEL GIBSON’S REMARKS**

On January 23, Mel Gibson was interviewed by Raymond Arroyo on the EWTN show “The World Over”; the discussion centered on Gibson’s yet-to-be released movie, “The Passion of the Christ.” Clips of the interview were shown on several TV shows, but only one has stirred controversy: “The Early Show” that aired today on CBS. “The Early Show” ran the following exchange between Arroyo and Gibson:

Gibson: “The film collectively blames *humanity* for the death of Jesus. Now there are no exemptions there. All right? I’m the first on the line for culpability—I did it. Christ died for all men, for all times.”

Arroyo: “Including the Jewish people?”

Gibson: “Yeah. They’re part of the human race....”

The problem is with the introductory comments made by Rene Syler of “The Early Show.” Here is what she said prior to the clip: “Some critics say it’s anti-Semitic because it blames Jews for the Crucifixion. In a TV interview Gibson does not deny it.”

Catholic League president William Donohue commented as follows:

“CBS has now added to the ruthless campaign against Mel Gibson and his movie. The statement by Rene Syler of what Gibson said was dishonest. To the extent that viewers accept her conclusion, they might well think Gibson is a bigot. But any fair-minded person who reads what Gibson actually said knows that CBS has acted unethically. CBS owes Mel Gibson an apology.

“The movie is a month away and the campaign against it has reached a fever pitch. The Catholic League is ready for the fight and will not be silenced by those who want to dictate history—past, present and future.”

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## **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."

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## **PRO-LIFE AND PRO-FAMILY DEMOCRATS LEFT HOMELESS**

Catholic League president William Donohue spoke today on the status of pro-life and pro-family Democrats:

"Every January 22, pro-life Americans rally in Washington D.C. to protest the infamous *Roe v. Wade* decision that legalized abortion. These men and women are drawn from all religions, races and ethnicities, and they form a core base among Republicans and Democrats. It is also true that support for the traditional understanding of marriage comes from all

sectors of American society. It is sad to note, however, that those Democrats who are pro-life and pro-family are being shunned—even mocked—by the Democratic National Committee.

“There is a group called Democrats for Life in America. Their goal is to move their party in a pro-life direction. But they have learned that the party of inclusion excludes them altogether. In vain have they tried to get the Democratic National Committee (DNC) to provide a link on its website to their organization. But the DNC has no problem providing a link to a notoriously anti-Catholic group, Catholics for a Free Choice. The passion for abortion rights is so extreme in the Democratic Party that it will bond with bigots who share its position before ever working with decent men and women of their party who differ with them on this issue.

“To make matters worse, DNC Chairman Terry McAuliffe said on January 21 that support for a constitutional amendment that would protect the institution of marriage from being altered by judicial fiat was a ‘mean-spirited measure’ that would ‘insert prejudice and discrimination into the U.S. Constitution.’ In doing so, the DNC has branded pro-family Democrats who support this measure as bigots.

“The effect of these decisions has been to leave pro-life and pro-family Democrats homeless. They are not drawn to the Republican Party for a whole host of reasons—their natural inclination is to vote Democrat. But now they are told they are anti-woman and bigots to boot.

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# TOLERATING SEXUAL ABUSE IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

The board of directors of the Boys Choir of Harlem voted unanimously yesterday to keep director Walter J. Turnbull, even though he engaged in a cover-up of child sexual molestation committed by one of his employees, Frank Jones Jr.; Jones is now in prison, having been convicted of 24 counts of sexual abuse and three counts of endangering the welfare of a child. Turnbull and New York City public school officials created the Choir Academy of Harlem, home to the Boys Choir.

The boy who was victimized took his complaint to Turnbull, and to his brother Horace (vice president of the Boys Choir), in 2001. But neither of the Turnbulls contacted city schools officials, as they were required to do by education department regulations. And they did not report the abuse to the authorities either (there is no law mandating school officials to do so). What they did do was to allow the molesting homosexual to chaperone 40 to 50 students on eight performances after education officials barred him from the school. Indeed, Jones spent 60 nights in hotels with students placed in his charge. Regarding his victim, Jones gave the boy the keys to his apartment and gave him free lunches.

Catholic League president William Donohue spoke to this issue today:

“Public school officials have a long record of tolerating the sexual molestation of minors. On the surface, the Boys Choir of Harlem case does not concern the Catholic League, but when we look closer we find something fascinating. The lawyer for the boy, Michael Dowd, is the same attorney who has sued Catholic dioceses for the same offense. But his gut reaction to Turnbull is in stark contrast to his stance on Church

officials who also tolerated abuse. Dowd does not want Turnbull to resign, but when it came to Brooklyn Bishop Thomas Daily, Dowd demanded his resignation for not punishing a molesting homosexual priest.

“This kind of double standard is commonplace all over the nation. There is one standard for bishops, another for public school officials. So let’s stop with the pretense that this issue is all about protecting kids: it’s about getting the Catholic Church.”

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## **CHECKMATE: NEWSDAY AND L.I. VOICE OF THE FAITHFUL**

Catholic League president William Donohue explained why a report on *Newsday* and Voice of the Faithful was sent to every pastor on Long Island (the report is available at [www.catholicleague.org](http://www.catholicleague.org)):

“The Catholic League tracks anti-Catholicism in all 50 states. In doing so, we learn where Catholic bashing is most rampant and who is responsible. Of particular concern to us is the situation on Long Island. The local daily, *Newsday*, has been on a tear against the Catholic Church for the past two years. Moreover, it has led an attack against Diocese of Rockville Centre Bishop William F. Murphy that is scurrilous. Working in tandem with *Newsday* is the Long Island chapter of Voice of the Faithful (some who write for the newspaper are active in Voice).

“All pastors on Long Island are now in possession of a packet of information that the Catholic League mailed on January 9. It includes a report on *Newsday* and an article on Voice of the

Faithful. The report offers excerpts from *Newsday* columnists and contributors in 2002 and 2003 that demonstrate a profound animus against both the Catholic Church and Bishop Murphy. The article, available in the [current edition of \*Crisis\* magazine](#), is a whistle-blowing piece written by the co-chairman of the communications committee of the Long Island chapter of Voice of the Faithful; it shows the ideological agenda of this supposedly neutral group.

“The Catholic League is not walking away from this battle. Moreover, it is up to *Newsday* and Voice of the Faithful to reverse course. If they do not, we will take further steps to checkmate their efforts.”