

# CRITICS OF “THE PASSION” CRACKUP

Catholic League president William Donohue notes today how critics of “The Passion of the Christ” continue to rant:

“In a Knight Ridder column, Rev. John Pawlikowski, director of the Catholic-Jewish Studies Program at the Catholic Theological Union, wrote the following: ‘Christians who react favorably to Gibson’s film are shamefully evading their religious responsibility.’ Thus did he indict Pope John Paul II; Cardinal Dario Castrillón Hoyos, Prefect of the Congregation for Clergy; Most Reverend John Foley, President of the Pontifical Council for Social Communications; Reverend Augustine Di Noia, Undersecretary of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith; Cardinal Francis George, Archbishop of Chicago; Cardinal George Pell, Archbishop of Sydney, Australia; Most Reverend Charles Chaput, Archbishop of Denver; Most Reverend John Donoghue, Archbishop of Atlanta; Most Reverend Robert C. Morlino, Bishop of Madison, Wisconsin; Reverend Richard John Neuhaus, Editor-in-Chief, *First Things*; Reverend Thomas Rosica, CEO, Salt and Light Catholic Media Foundation; theologian Michael Novak; and scores of Protestant leaders from virtually every denomination.

“Yesterday, *New York Times* columnist Frank Rich labeled ‘The Passion’ a ‘porn movie,’ noting ‘its laborious build-up to its orgasmic spurtings of blood and other bodily fluids.’ He also said that when Mel Gibson was speaking of his critics in his interview with Diane Sawyer, Mel must have been referring to him: ‘But Ms. Sawyer never identified me as Jewish, thereby sanitizing Mr. Gibson’s rant of its truculent meaning. (She did show a picture of me, though, perhaps assuming that my nose might give me away.)’ How observant.

“On August 3, 2003, Rich said, ‘it’s hard to imagine the movie

being anything other than a flop in America.’ It must break his heart to know the film has well surpassed the \$200 million mark.

“In short, Christians who don’t agree with Pawlikowski are acting irresponsibly, and those who criticize Rich are anti-Semitic. Thus does the crackup continue.”

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## ADL “PASSION” GUIDE FOR TEENS IS FLAWED

The ADL has issued an online guide, *Things Teens Should Know about Mel Gibson’s “The Passion of the Christ.”* Most of it is fair enough, but not when it comes to the issue of whether the film accurately reflects Church teachings. Of the Gibson movie, the guide says, “His film does not adhere to these [Vatican II’s] guidelines.”

Catholic League president William Donohue disagrees:

“The ADL has failed in a) altering the movie’s script b) getting the Vatican to denounce the movie c) getting the U.S. bishops to denounce the film, and d) getting a postscript. Now it is instructing the public that ‘The Passion of the Christ’ contravenes Church teachings. We’re getting used to the chutzpah, but the ADL’s latest salvo deserves an answer.

“The movie has been heralded by such Catholic heavyweights as Pope John Paul II (yes, he did say, ‘It is as it was’); Cardinal Dario Castrillón Hoyos, Prefect of the Congregation for Clergy; Most Reverend John Foley, President of the Pontifical Council for Social Communications; Reverend Augustine Di Noia, Undersecretary of the Congregation for the

Doctrine of the Faith; Cardinal Francis George, Archbishop of Chicago; Cardinal George Pell, Archbishop of Sydney, Australia; Most Reverend Charles Chaput, Archbishop of Denver; Most Reverend John Donoghue, Archbishop of Atlanta; Reverend Richard John Neuhaus, Editor-in-Chief, *First Things*; Reverend Thomas Rosica, CEO, Salt and Light Catholic Media Foundation; and theologian Michael Novak.

“According to the ADL, all these authorities are wrong. Do those at the ADL really think anyone will believe them?

“Finally, let’s put one thing to rest: 1965 was *not* the first time the Catholic Church condemned collective guilt of the Jews for the death of Christ. Indeed, the *Catechism* that the ADL so likes on this subject quotes a passage from the Council of Trent that also condemns collective guilt. And it was written in the mid-1500s!”

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## POPE GIVES KUDOS TO MEL GIBSON’S MOVIE

Catholic League president William Donohue issued the following remarks today on word that Pope John Paul II has given his approval to the Mel Gibson movie, “The Passion of the Christ”:

“Pope John Paul II has seen Mel’s masterpiece and, like virtually everyone else, likes what he has seen. He expressly said, ‘It is as it was.’ The immediate fallout on Mel’s critics—the ones who hate the film without having seen it—is not known. That is because they are divided into two camps: Jewish activists who are genuinely concerned about anti-

Semitism, and an ad hoc group of Catholic and Jewish theologians who have an agenda.

“In the first camp are people like Dov Hikind, a Jewish state legislator from New York. Hikind worries that the film might incite anti-Semitism. Having seen the movie twice myself, I have tried to convince him that his fears are unfounded. He has, quite correctly, said that this is something he must determine for himself. It is my hope that he will reach the same conclusion I have. But even if he does not, he commands my respect and support. As I have said many times over the past few months, I can certainly appreciate why there may be a certain degree of apprehension in the Jewish community over this movie—I, too, would be wary if I were Jewish. Fortunately, the film engenders sacrifice and love, not hate.

“The other camp is a different story altogether. Some members of the ad hoc committee, like Paula Fredriksen, have accused Gibson of promoting violence. Another, John Pawlikowski, has blasted the Catholic League for defending Mel, calling him ‘a heretic.’ Moreover, Philip Cunningham and Sister Mary Boys have joined the other two in denouncing Gibson for allegedly violating their own trumped up rules governing depictions of the Passion. Acting like the proponents of a neo-Hays code, they arrogantly think Mel should have had to run the film by them for approval. He doesn’t need to—the pope’s on board.

“This latter group has two choices: they can either find a spider hole and crawl in it, or they can just keep on talking. Call it a Hobson’s choice.”

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# CONNECTICUT LIBRARY CENSORS JESUS

Officials of Meriden Public Library in Meriden, Connecticut, have banned five images of Jesus from display in the library. The paintings, all of which are reverential, were nonetheless deemed violative of a policy that disallows “inappropriate” and “offensive” fare.

The paintings portray a nativity scene, Jesus carrying the cross, His crucifixion, resurrection and a portrait of Christ with a halo. Children, library officials argued, might be disturbed to see these images. The rest of the exhibit, “Visions, Hopes and Dreams,” was declared acceptable, but artist Mary Morley canceled it when she was told to censor Jesus. Portraits of Pope John Paul II, Mother Teresa, Moses with the Ten Commandments, as well as the prophet Elijah, made the cut.

Catholic League president William Donohue spoke to this issue today:

“In 1996, Meriden Public Library received a \$3,000 grant from the American Library Association (ALA) to fund a five-part book discussion on the values and attitudes that Americans bring to the workplace. One of those values surely is tolerance, yet for some reason this property never took root in the heads of the officials of the Meriden Public Library. In the name of protecting kids from seeing a portrait of Jesus, the censors are busy practicing intolerance. Perhaps they would have been more at home with a portrait of Lucifer.

“I am writing today to Keith Michael Fiels, Executive Director of the ALA in Chicago, to request that the ALA censure the Meriden Public Library for censoring Jesus. I will also ask that the ALA refrain from giving the library any future

grants.

“On a larger scale, what is amazing about this is that for the past several years, public librarians all over the country have furiously objected to any technology that would protect kids from accessing pornography on library computers. But it’s not as though they are value-free—what some of them can’t stomach is an image of Jesus Christ. So they do make value judgments after all.”

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## **MEDIA TREAT POPE FAIRLY (FOR THE MOST PART)**

Over the past week, the Catholic League has been carefully monitoring media coverage of Pope John Paul II’s Silver Jubilee. Catholic League president William Donohue summarized the league’s observations today:

“Most of the print and electronic media did a very fair job covering the events surrounding the Silver Jubilee of Pope John Paul II. As expected, commentary on the pope’s tenure, whether expressed as an editorial or by a columnist, tended to be more critical. But criticism of the pope, or of any Catholic teaching or tradition, is not synonymous with bigotry. Indeed, the charge of anti-Catholicism loses force when promiscuously distributed: it should be reserved for instances when criticism spills over into disdain, disparagement and insult. Take, for example, the article in today’s *Los Angeles Times* by Daniel C. Maguire, professor of moral theology at Marquette University. Here is a sample of his vitriol:

- The pope has “squandered his moral authority on issues

in which he has no privileged expertise.”

- The pope has “silenced the voices of many Catholic theologians and arrogantly asserted his own unique teaching prerogatives in ways that cut the legs out from any true ecumenism.”
- “Two areas especially signaled his inadequacy as a moral world leader: his demeaning view of half the human race—women—and his obsessive concern with what can be called pelvic orthodoxy.”
- The reason why Mother Teresa is being elevated to sainthood is because she “was a firm defender of male dominance.”
- The Vatican holds an “unduly privileged perch” at the U.N., “even though it strains credulity to ponder how 110 acres with no women and children could be considered a ‘nation.’”
- Vatican opposition to condoms is “murderous.”
- It smacks of a “naïve mythology” to see the pope as “almost single-handedly bringing down Soviet communism.”

“This is the voice of an embittered ex-priest, now in his seventies, in search of an audience. We just gave him one.”

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## JUDGING THE POPE BY THE POLLS

On the day Pope John Paul II celebrates his Silver Jubilee, the results of two new polls on his performance have been released. For the purpose of simplicity, the first poll will be called the USA TODAY/CNN/Gallup poll; the second will be named the Washington Post-ABC poll. Catholic League president William Donohue offered his analysis today:

“Fifty-three percent of Catholics in the first poll, and 62

percent of those in the second poll, say the pope is 'out of touch' with the views of American Catholics. Yet 63 percent in the first poll, and 80 percent in the second, approve of his leadership. Indeed, almost 90 percent of Catholics in the second poll (the first did not ask this question) give the pope high marks for 'preserving the church's traditions.' What gives?

"It is too easy to say that Catholics like the pope personally but don't like some of his teachings. To begin with, there is a strong correlation between Catholics who attend Mass on a regular basis and support for the Church's teachings. The obverse being true as well, it means little to factor non-practicing Catholics into any survey of Catholics (vegetarians who eat hot dogs at baseball games do not provide insight into the sentiments of vegetarians).

"So what gives? Many Catholics are somewhat conflicted: they admire the pope for being the steady moral anchor that he is while continuing to express some of the more secular values of the dominant culture. What seems not to be understood is that if the pope sought to bring the Church's teachings more into line with the values of the dominant culture, he would lose the respect of the very same people who voice a desire for change. People respect leaders for doing what is right—not for appeasing their preferences.

"Furthermore, to suggest—as some aging dissidents have—that most practicing Catholics are up in arms over the absence of certain reforms is not only absurd (Catholics can leave and join any number of religions that have succumbed to the culture), it suggests a reluctance to credit them with good judgment for approving the pope's performance."

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# NEW YORK TIMES MAKES “COLLAPSED CATHOLIC” ITS TOP EDITOR

The New York Times announced today that Bill Keller has been named executive editor. Catholic League president Bill Donohue immediately took note:

“In a wide-ranging piece Bill Keller wrote for the New York Times on May 4, 2002, he said, ‘I am what a friend calls a ‘collapsed Catholic’—well beyond lapsed....’ He did not say who his friend was but let me guess. Anna Quindlen? Maureen Dowd? In any event, in this same column Keller offered the following insights:

- “Karol Wojtyla [Pope John Paul II] has shaped a hierarchy that is intolerant of dissent, unaccountable to its members, secretive in the extreme and willfully clueless about how people live.” Sounds like the newsroom commenting on Keller’s predecessor, Howell Raines.
- “Like the Communist Party circa Leonid Brezhnev, the Vatican exists first and foremost to preserve its power.” Now consider how Susan E. Tifft, co-author of a book on the Times, commented on the way the Sulzberger family (who own the paper) reacted to the Jayson Blair mess: “Even when it’s difficult, the family will do whatever they have to protect this jewel, their newspaper.”
- “He [the pope] has trained bishops that the path of advancement is obsequious obedience to himself.” Which is perhaps preferable to obsequious obedience to affirmative action.
- “This is, after all, the church that gave us the Crusades and the Inquisition.” This is, after all, the same newspaper that lied about the Communist slaughter of the Ukrainians in the 1930s, ran a grand total of 9 editorials criticizing the

Nazis in 1941, 1942 and 1943, and labeled Fidel Castro “an agrarian reformer.”

“Thus are Catholics acquainted with Bill Keller. It is worth remembering that during the Jayson Blair scandal, publisher Arthur Sulzberger Jr. said it was wrong to ‘demonize’ the top brass at the Times. We look to Keller to do likewise to the Catholic Church, ‘collapsed Catholic’ or no.”

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## **ANTI-WAR CROWD EXPLOITS THE POPE**

Catholic League president William Donohue spoke today on how the pope’s words on the war are being exploited by anti-war activists:

“It comes as no surprise that the pope is viscerally anti-war. But he is also no pacifist. Pope John Paul II has said repeatedly that war cannot be decided upon ‘except as the very last option.’ What he has not said, though such words have been attributed to him, is that there is no legal or moral justification for the war. In any event, it is striking how many new friends the Pontiff has these days.

“Jessica Lange is anti-war and pro-abortion. The NARAL enthusiast is now praising the pope for his position on the war. What she fails to mention is that when the pope told a gathering of world leaders to say ‘No To War’ on January 13, he began by admonishing them to say ‘No To Death’; he specifically cited ‘the incomparable dignity of every human being, beginning with that of unborn children.’ Hear that Jessica?

“Michael Moore is quoted today saying, ‘The pope even came right out and said it: This war in Iraq is not a just war and, thus, it is a sin.’ But the pope never said this is not a just war, never mind a sinful exercise.

“The reaction of Catholic dissidents and anti-Catholics who are part of the anti-war crowd to the pope is even more comical. The *National Catholic Reporter* is a Catholic weekly that never tires of railing against papal authority; ditto for Call the Action, an organization of Catholic malcontents. Yet both are now lauding the pope for his leadership on the war. Even that inveterate Catholic basher Frances Kissling is now speaking of the ‘humanitarian’ vision of the Vatican and the ‘religious authority of the pope.’ Maybe she’ll convert to Catholicism yet.

“We’ll call these people sincere when they stop exploiting the pope’s words on the war and start showing real and consistent respect for his teachings on all subjects.”

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## **BILL O'REILLY IMPLIES POPE IS SOFT ON SADDAM**

Fox News Network talk show host Bill O'Reilly last night criticized Pope John Paul II for not having “a position on Saddam [Hussein].” After commenting on the brutality of Saddam Hussein’s regime, O'Reilly said, “And then the pope sits in Rome and says, gee, this is terrible, but does not throw his moral authority behind removing this dictator.”

Catholic League president William Donohue commented on O'Reilly’s remarks as follows:

“Bill O’Reilly has made no secret about his contempt for Pope John Paul II. On his radio show on March 5 he explicitly said, ‘I have never liked this pope. I have always felt he was an autocrat who had no vision about how people live in the real world.’ Now he is implying that the Holy Father is giving a wink and a nod to Saddam Hussein.

“O’Reilly’s ramblings about the pope do not make him an anti-Catholic. But it does make him an ignoramus. The pope does not have a ‘position’ on Saddam Hussein anymore than he has one on George W. Bush. But he does have a position on the culture of death and all that it represents. Indeed, there is no one in the world who has more forthrightly addressed issues like genocide, torture, abortion and the like than Pope John Paul II. For O’Reilly to suggest that the pope is soft on Saddam is scurrilous.

“Just last Saturday Fidel Castro presided over the inauguration of a new convent of nuns in Cuba. He did so as a fitting tribute to the fifth anniversary of Pope John Paul II’s visit to Cuba. Now it will no doubt come as a tremendous shock to Bill O’Reilly to learn that the pope was able to accomplish this without ever having a position on Fidel Castro. Come to think of it, the pope never had a position on any of the Soviet Union’s officials, yet even Gorbachev credited the Holy Father with bringing about the implosion of the U.S.S.R.

“It’s time O’Reilly took a deep breath and stopped with the hyperbole. It’s also time he learned a little more about his own religion.”

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# CHURCH-SUING LAWYERS DESERVE MONITORING

Catholic League president William Donohue explained today why the league is monitoring attorneys involved in prosecuting cases of priestly sexual abuse:

“Just as no attorney who is prosecuting cases of sexual abuse by Catholic priests should immediately be declared suspect, none should escape examination himself. The Catholic League has found that, by and large, attorneys involved in these cases have acted professionally and harbor no agenda. But what happened today gives us pause: sex abuse-victim attorney Jeffrey R. Anderson appeared at a press conference hosted by an anti-Catholic group.

“The most mainstream of all anti-Catholic organizations in the nation is Catholics for a Free Choice. Its president, Frances Kissling, has long been obsessed with attacking the Catholic Church in every way possible. Today she held a press conference in New York City demanding that the United Nations involve itself in the Church scandal. This is hardly newsworthy—Kissling has been pressing to downgrade the Holy See’s U.N. status as a permanent observer for the past several years—but it does mark something disturbing when the most prolific litigant against the Church stands side-by-side with her. Anderson has handled more than 500 cases against the Church, more than any other attorney.

“This is not the only reason the Catholic League is wary of Anderson. He has a penchant for casting wide nets and for dabbling in conspiracy theories. For example, unlike other lawyers involved in these cases, Anderson has resorted to the widely discredited RICO law to sue the Vatican and Pope John Paul II, as well as several dioceses. Indeed, his fascination with the Vatican antedates the current scandal: in 1993 he

publicly denounced the late Pope Paul VI for being legally responsible for the behavior of a sex-abusing priest, James Porter, simply because Porter admitted his conduct to the pope.

“For these reasons, the Catholic League is suspect about the motives and behavior of Jeffrey R. Anderson.”