

“THE PASSION OF THE CHRIST” OPENS AMIDST FUROR

The February 25th opening of “The Passion of the Christ” was one of the most anticipated openings of any movie in American history. That it opened on Ash Wednesday made it all the more special.

Advance ticket sales to the Mel Gibson film were astonishing. News reports cited many Protestant organizations buying up large blocks of tickets; they also cited the Catholic League as the most prominent of Catholic organizations purchasing advance tickets.

The Catholic League subsidized the sale of advance tickets and was sold out of 1,200 tickets in two days. So we bought another 2,000 tickets—they also sold like hotcakes. After that, we advised members to purchase advance tickets online.

Most of the pre-show publicity was positive, but the media seemed to hype the negative comments. Leading the charge against the movie were the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) and the Simon Wiesenthal Center. Abraham Foxman, national director of the ADL, and Rabbi Marvin Hier, founder of the Simon Wiesenthal Center, accused Mel Gibson of fomenting anti-Semitism.

The Catholic League was not content to simply be Mel Gibson’s cheerleader. We directly confronted Foxman in writing and Hier on television. Our unwavering defense of Gibson led us to charge that Foxman and Hier were guilty of poisoning Christian-Jewish relations. Though they deny this charge, their comments speak for themselves.

Things got so hot that William Donohue felt compelled to issue a 6-page “Open Letter to the Jewish Community.” The letter, reprinted in this edition of *Catalyst*, expresses Donohue’s

concerns over some inflammatory language made by Foxman and others. In particular, Donohue takes exception to an anti-Christian remark made by Foxman.

Critics of the movie have not been content to say that they fear anti-Semitic attitudes as a result of the film; they have charged that Christians may engage in acts of violence against Jews. Donohue maintains that such language is incendiary and irresponsible.

Many Jews previewed the film and did not find it to be anti-Semitic. Therefore, the views of Foxman and Hier are not representative of the Jewish community. On the other hand, given their prominence in Jewish circles, what they say carries significant weight: the media afford them a high profile. This explains why the Catholic League has been so determined to provide a rational response.

SEX ABUSE REPORT

On February 27, professors from John Jay College of Criminal Justice in New York City released a report on priestly sexual abuse since 1950. In anticipation of the report, the Catholic League prepared its own report; it was released in early February. The complete document is reprinted in this edition of *Catalyst*.

The Catholic League strongly believes that no reasonable discussion of this issue can take place absent comparative data. What good does it do, we ask, to discuss sexual misconduct among priests if we don't have data on ministers, rabbis, psychologists, coaches, public school teachers and others?

The Special Report, *Sexual Abuse in Social Context: Catholic Clergy and Other Professionals*, does not excuse wrongdoing by priests or bishops. What it seeks to understand is how widespread the problem of sexual abuse is. In doing so, it directs the conversation away from an isolated look at priests and towards a more realistic examination of the problem.

The report was sent to every bishop in the U.S. and to every major media outlet in the nation. The president of the United States Catholic Conference of Bishops, Bishop Wilton Gregory, thanked William Donohue for writing the report.

The initial reaction to the report has been encouraging. Many priests feel that they have been under siege in recent times: they resent being singled out for scrutiny. That is why so many of them are pleased with this report—it helps to stop the scapegoating that has been taking place.

HOT BUTTON ISSUES MARK COLD WINTER

William A. Donohue

This issue of *Catalyst* is not like any other. Normally, we run a series of articles that touch on anti-Catholicism and related issues. But this time we are featuring two very special items: “An Open Letter to the Jewish Community” and a Special Report, *Sexual Abuse in Social Context: Catholic Clergy and Other Professionals*. Both were published as separate documents and were mailed to a variety of prominent individuals and organizations. They are reprinted here so that all Catholic League members can read them.

The need for the latter report was occasioned by the release of two major studies conducted by John Jay College of Criminal Justice. One study was to focus on the abuse of minors by priests since 1950; the other was to address the causes and consequences of the scandal. Both of these studies were commissioned by the bishops when they met in Dallas in June 2002. Readers will recall what a frenzied environment that was—it turned into a ruckus where some unreflective judgments were made. Among them was the decision to authorize the John Jay studies.

It is always wrong to compare apples with oranges, but it is worse to examine data absent a comparative base. That is why I decided to tackle this issue headfirst. My goal was to learn the extent of this problem outside the confines of the priesthood.

What I found was quite interesting: youngsters are more likely to be molested in the home than anyplace else; the incidence of abuse is slightly higher among the Protestant clergy; and it is significantly higher among public school teachers. In other words, the near exclusive media focus on priests is unwarranted and unfair.

This issue alone would have been enough to consume the attention of the Catholic League over the winter. But as it turned out, there was another hot button issue we were forced to deal with, namely the controversy over the Mel Gibson movie, "The Passion of the Christ."

During my tenure as president of the Catholic League, we have dealt with a number of very important issues. But nothing like the Gibson film. This movie represents the crystallization of the culture war in a way no other issue ever has. Moreover, it has managed to touch everyone from the pope to the paparazzi, jolting fan and foe alike.

Regarding the pope, contrary to what has been said, the Holy

Father said of the movie, "It is as it was." But because some in the Vatican did not want the pope to appear to be issuing a formal endorsement of the film, they began to backtrack. Politics aside, the pope liked the film.

Abe Foxman of the ADL didn't like the film. In fact, he said the movie is anti-Semitic and may engender violence against Jews. A fundraising letter read, "Of great concern to the Anti-Defamation League is the possibility that individuals are more likely to be targets of attack, simply because they are 'different.'" It is Christians who Foxman fears the most: he says the film "is not being sold as a movie. It's being sold as a religious experience, as a pilgrimage, as a way back to faith." This is his worst nightmare—that Christians who left the faith may return.

As for Foxman's fear of Christian violence against Jews, he's talking nonsense. James Shapiro is a Columbia University professor who has written the definitive book on the subject of Passion Plays, *Oberammergau: The Troubling Story of the World's Most Famous Passion Play*. I recently asked him when was the last time Jews were beaten up after a Passion Play. Aside from a Catholic convert in Nazi Germany who was attacked, we have to go back to the Middle Ages to find examples. And in the U.S., there is no record of violence against Jews following any Passion Play. In short, there is no need to call out the National Guard.

It is important in times like these not to forget that Jews are no more monolithic than Catholics—we come in all shapes, sizes, ideologies and temperaments. It is okay to disagree—even robustly—as long as it is done in a civil way. This was the spirit that brought Catholics and Jews together following the opening of the movie.

Rabbi Joseph Potasnik is the president of the New York Board of Rabbis. We have been friends for many years and, in fact, have appeared on TV in debates on the same side of the issue.

It was his idea to keep relations between Catholics and Jews solid by agreeing to watch the movie on opening day and then hold a press conference afterwards. Prior to doing so we agreed—four rabbis, three priests and myself—to “10 Principles of Religious Understanding.”

The reason we came together was to show that Catholics and Jews can disagree about a film without ever impairing our common bond. This is what real friendship is all about. Now go watch the movie!

SEXUAL ABUSE IN SOCIAL CONTEXT: CATHOLIC CLERGY AND OTHER PROFESSIONALS

**Special Report by Catholic League for Religious and Civil
Rights**

February 2004

PREFACE

The purpose of this special report is to put the recent scandal in the Catholic Church in perspective. It does not seek to exculpate anyone who had anything to do with priestly sexual misconduct, but it does seek to challenge those who continue to treat this issue in isolation. Indeed, to discuss the incidence of sexual abuse committed by Roman Catholic priests without reference to the level of offense found among the clergy of other religions, or to that of other professionals, is grossly unfair.

Specifically, this report was prepared to guide the discussion that will inevitably follow two major studies that will be issued on February 27. One of them, a national study on the extent of sexual abuse of minors by priests since 1950, will be released by John Jay College of Criminal Justice in New York City. The other is a study of the causes and consequences of the abuse crisis; it will be released by the National Review Board that was established by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. Both studies were done at the request of the U.S. bishops.

It is the belief of the Catholic League that no meaningful conversation can take place on this issue without having some baseline data regarding the incidence of abuse that occurs outside the Catholic Church. That was the sole intent of this special report, and if it contributes to that end, then it will have been a success.

William A. Donohue, Ph.D. President

OVERALL DATA

The National Child Abuse and Neglect Data Systems was developed by the Children's Bureau of the U.S. Department of Human Services in partnership with the States to collect annual statistics on child maltreatment from State child protective services agencies. For the year 2001, it was found that approximately 903,000 children were victims of child maltreatment, 10 percent of whom (or 90,000) were sexually abused. It also found that 59 percent of the perpetrators of child abuse or neglect were women and 41 percent were men.[i]

In 2001, clinical child psychologist Wade F. Horn reported on the work of researchers at Johns Hopkins University School of Public Health. The researchers found that nearly 20 percent of low-income women, recruited through family planning, obstetrical or gynecological clinics, had experienced child sexual abuse.

Horn summarized the researchers' findings on poor women as follows: "Family friends and acquaintances compose the largest group of perpetrators (28 percent), followed by such relatives as uncles and cousins (18 percent), stepfathers (12 percent), male siblings (10 percent), biological fathers (10 percent), boyfriends of the child's mother (9 percent), grandfathers and stepgrandfathers (7 percent), and strangers (4 percent)." Horn was struck by the fact that 10 percent were biological fathers and only 4 percent were strangers. "Which means," he said, "86 percent of the perpetrators were known to the family, but were someone other than the child's father." [ii]

According to Dr. Garth A. Rattray, about the same incidence of abuse occurs among all the socio-economic classes. For example, he reports that "about 85 percent of the offenders [of child sexual abuse] are family members, babysitters, neighbors, family friends or relatives. About one in six child molesters are other children." Unlike the first study cited, Rattray reports that most of the offenders are male. [iii]

It is obvious that children are much more likely to be sexually abused by family members and friends than by anyone else. This suggests that if preventative measures are to work, they must begin in the home, and not someplace else.

PRIESTS

According to a survey by the *Washington Post*, over the last four decades, less than 1.5 percent of the estimated 60,000 or more men who have served in the Catholic clergy have been accused of child sexual abuse. [iv] According to a survey by the *New York Times*, 1.8 percent of all priests ordained from 1950 to 2001 have been accused of child sexual abuse. [v] Thomas Kane, author of *Priests are People Too*, estimates that between 1 and 1.5 percent of priests have had charges made against them. [vi] Of contemporary priests, the Associated Press found that approximately two-thirds of 1 percent of

priests have charges pending against them.[vii]

Almost all the priests who abuse children are homosexuals. Dr. Thomas Plante, a psychologist at Santa Clara University, found that "80 to 90% of all priests who in fact abuse minors have sexually engaged with adolescent boys, not prepubescent children. Thus, the teenager is more at risk than the young altar boy or girls of any age." [viii]

The situation in Boston, the epicenter of the scandal, is even worse. According to the *Boston Globe*, "Of the clergy sex abuse cases referred to prosecutors in Eastern Massachusetts, more than 90 percent involve male victims. And the most prominent Boston lawyers for alleged victims of clergy sexual abuse have said that about 95 percent of their clients are male." [ix]

In a database analysis of reports on more than 1,200 alleged victims of priests identified by *USA Today*, 85 percent were males.[x] In another study by *USA Today*, it was determined that of the 234 priests who have been accused of sexual abuse of a minor while serving in the nation's 10 largest dioceses and archdioceses, 91 percent of their victims were males.[xi]

Much has been made of a survey done by the *Dallas Morning News* which claims that two-thirds of the nation's bishops have allowed priests accused of sexual abuse to continue working. But the problem with the survey is its definition of abuse—it includes everything from "ignoring warnings about suspicious behavior" to "criminal convictions." [xii] Thus, the survey is of limited utility.

MINISTERS

The data on the Protestant clergy tend to focus on sexual abuse in general, not on sexual abuse of children. Thus, strict comparisons cannot always be made. But there are some comparative data available on the subject of child sexual molestation, and what has been reported is quite revealing.

In a 1984 survey, 38.6 percent of ministers reported sexual contact with a church member, and 76 percent knew of another minister who had had sexual intercourse with a parishioner.[xiii] In the same year, a Fuller Seminary survey of 1,200 ministers found that 20 percent of theologically “conservative” pastors admitted to some sexual contact outside of marriage with a church member. The figure jumped to over 40 percent for “moderates”; 50 percent of “liberal” pastors confessed to similar behavior.[xiv]

In 1990, in a study by the Park Ridge Center for the Study of Health, Faith and Ethics in Chicago, it was learned that 10 percent of ministers said they had had an affair with a parishioner and about 25 percent admitted some sexual contact with a parishioner.[xv] Two years later, a survey by *Leadership* magazine found that 37 percent of ministers confessed to having been involved in “inappropriate sexual behavior” with a parishioner.[xvi]

In a 1993 survey by the *Journal of Pastoral Care*, 14 percent of Southern Baptist ministers said they had engaged in “inappropriate sexual behavior,” and 70 percent said they knew a minister who had had such contact with a parishioner.[xvii] Joe E. Trull is co-author of the 1993 book, *Ministerial Ethics*, and he found that “from 30 to 35 percent of ministers of all denominations admit to having sexual relationships—from inappropriate touching to sexual intercourse—outside of marriage.”[xviii]

According to a 2000 report to the Baptist General Convention in Texas, “The incidence of sexual abuse by clergy has reached ‘horrific proportions.’” It noted that in studies done in the 1980s, 12 percent of ministers had “engaged in sexual intercourse with members” and nearly 40 percent had “acknowledged sexually inappropriate behavior.” The report concluded that “The disturbing aspect of all research is that the rate of incidence for clergy exceeds the client-professional rate for physicians and psychologists.”[xix]

Regarding pornography and sexual addiction, a national survey disclosed that about 20 percent of all ministers are involved in the behavior.[xx]

In the spring of 2002, when the sexual abuse scandal in the Catholic Church was receiving unprecedented attention, the *Christian Science Monitor* reported on the results of national surveys by Christian Ministry Resources. The conclusion: "Despite headlines focusing on the priest pedophile problem in the Roman Catholic Church, most American churches being hit with child sexual-abuse allegations are Protestant, and most of the alleged abusers are not clergy or staff, but church volunteers." [xxi]

Finally, in the authoritative work by Penn State professor Philip Jenkins, *Pedophiles and Priests*, it was determined that between .2 and 1.7 percent of priests are pedophiles. The figure among the Protestant clergy ranges between 2 and 3 percent.[xxii]

OTHER CLERGY AND PROFESSIONALS

Rabbi Arthur Gross Schaefer is a professor of law and ethics at Loyola Marymount University. It is his belief that sexual abuse among rabbis approximates that found among the Protestant clergy. According to one study, 73 percent of women rabbis report instances of sexual harassment. "Sadly," Rabbi Schaefer concludes, "our community's reactions up to this point have been often based on keeping things quiet in an attempt to do 'damage control.' Fear of lawsuits and bad publicity have dictated an atmosphere of hushed voices and outrage against those who dare to break ranks by speaking out." [xxiii]

Rabbi Joel Meyers, executive vice president of the Conservative Rabbinical Assembly, reports that 30 percent of rabbis who changed positions in 2000 did so involuntarily, and that sexual abuse was a factor in many instances.[xxiv] The

Awareness Center devotes an entire website to "Clergy Abuse: Rabbis, Cantors & Other Trusted Officials." It is a detailed and frank look at the problem of sexual abuse by rabbis.[xxv]

The problem of sexual abuse in the Jehovah's Witnesses is evident among church elders but most of the abuse comes from congregation members. "The victims who have stepped forward are mostly girls and young women," writes Laurie Goodstein in the *New York Times*, "and many accusations involve incest." There is a victims support group available, "silentlambs," that has collected more than 5,000 Witnesses contending that the church mishandled child sexual abuse.[xxvi]

According to one study, .2 percent of athletic coaches nationwide have a criminal record of some sort of sexual offense. This translates to about 6,000 coaches in the U.S. who have been tried and found guilty of sexual offense against children.[xxvii] It is not known how many more offenders have escaped the reach of law enforcement.

Between 3 and 12 percent of psychologists have had sexual contact with their clients. While today virtually every state considers sexual contact with a client as worthy of revoking a psychologist's license, as recently as 1987 only 31 percent of state licensing boards considered sexual relations between a psychologist and his or her patient grounds for license revocation.[xxviii] What makes this statistic so interesting is that many bishops in the 1980s took the advice of psychologists in handling molesting priests.

TEACHERS

The American Medical Association found in 1986 that one in four girls, and one in eight boys, are sexually abused in or out of school before the age of 18. Two years later, a study included in *The Handbook on Sexual Abuse of Children*, reported that one in four girls, and one in six boys, is sexually abused by age 18.[xxix] It was reported in 1991 that 17.7

percent of males who graduated from high school, and 82.2 percent of females, reported sexual harassment by faculty or staff during their years in school. Fully 13.5 percent said they had sexual intercourse with their teacher.[xxx]

In New York City alone, at least one child is sexually abused by a school employee every day. One study concluded that more than 60 percent of employees accused of sexual abuse in the New York City schools were transferred to desk jobs at district offices located inside the schools. Most of these teachers are tenured and 40 percent of those transferred are repeat offenders. They call it “passing the garbage” in the schools. One reason why this exists is due to efforts by the United Federation of Teachers to protect teachers at the expense of children.[xxxi] Another is the fact that teachers accused of sexual misconduct cannot be fired under New York State law.[xxxii]

One of the nation’s foremost authorities on the subject of the sexual abuse of minors in public schools is Hofstra University professor Charol Shakeshaft. In 1994, Shakeshaft and Audrey Cohan did a study of 225 cases of educator sexual abuse in New York City. Their findings are astounding.

All of the accused admitted sexual abuse of a student, but none of the abusers was reported to the authorities, and only 1 percent lost their license to teach. Only 35 percent suffered negative consequences of any kind, and 39 percent chose to leave their school district, most with positive recommendations. Some were even given an early retirement package.[xxxiii]

Moving molesting teachers from school district to school district is a common phenomenon. And in only 1 percent of the cases do superintendents notify the new school district.[xxxiv] According to Diana Jean Schemo, the term “passing the trash” is the preferred jargon among educators.[xxxv]

Shakeshaft has also determined that 15 percent of all students have experienced some kind of sexual misconduct by a teacher between kindergarten and 12th grade; the behaviors range from touching to forced penetration.[xxxvi] She and Cohan also found that up to 5 percent of teachers sexually abuse children.[xxxvii] Shakeshaft will soon be ready to release the findings of a vast study undertaken for the Planning and Evaluation Service Office of the Undersecretary, U.S. Department of Education, titled, "Educator Sexual Misconduct with Students: A Synthesis of Existing Literature on Prevalence in Connection with the Design of a National Analysis." [xxxviii]

CONCLUSION

The issue of child sexual molestation is deserving of serious scholarship. Too often, assumptions have been made that this problem is worse in the Catholic clergy than in other sectors of society. This report does not support this conclusion. Indeed, it shows that family members are the most likely to sexually molest a child. It also shows that the incidence of the sexual abuse of a minor is slightly higher among the Protestant clergy than among the Catholic clergy, and that it is significantly higher among public school teachers than among ministers and priests.

In a survey for the *Wall Street Journal-NBC News*, it was found that 64 percent of the public thought that Catholic priests frequently abused children.[xxxix] This is outrageously unfair, but it is not surprising given the media fixation on this issue. While it would be unfair to blame the media for the scandal in the Catholic Church, the constant drumbeat of negative reporting surely accounts for these remarkably skewed results.[xl]

Without comparative data, little can be learned. Numbers are not without meaning, but they don't count for much unless a baseline has been established. Moreover, sexual misconduct is

difficult to measure given its mostly private nature. While crime statistics are helpful, we know from social science research that most crimes go unreported. This is especially true of sexual abuse crimes. At the end of the day, estimates culled from survey research are the best we can do.

By putting the sexual abuse scandal in the Catholic Church in perspective, it is hoped that this report will make for a more fair and educated public response.

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[ii] Wade F. Horn, "Common-sense article about abuse," *Washington Times*, February 6, 2001, p. E1.

[iii] Dr. Garth A. Rattray, "Child Molesters and Paedophilia," *The Gleaner*, May 14, 2002.

[iv] Alan Cooperman, "Hundreds of Priests Removed Since '60s; Survey Shows Scope Wider Than Disclosed," *Washington Post*, June 9, 2002, p. A1.

[v] Laurie Goodstein, "Decades of Damage; Trail of Pain in Church Crisis Leads to Nearly Every Diocese," *New York Times*, January 12, 2003, Section 1, p. 1.

[vi] Interviewed by Bill O'Reilly, Transcript of "The O'Reilly Factor," May 3, 2002.

[vii] Bob von Sternberg, "Insurance Falls Short in Church Abuse Cases; Catholic Dioceses are Forced to Find other Sources to Pay Settlements," *Star Tribune*, July 27, 2002, p. 1A.

[viii] Thomas Plante, "A Perspective on Clergy Sexual Abuse," www.psywww.com/psyrelig/plante.html.

[ix] Thomas Farragher and Matt Carroll, "Church Board Dismissed Accusations by Females," *Boston.com*, February 2, 2003.

[x] Janet Kornblum, "85% of Church Abuse Victims are Male, Research Finds," *USA Today*, July 24, 2002, pp. 6-7D.

[xi] "The Accusers and the Accused," *USA Today*, November 11, 2002, p. 7D.

[xii] Brooks Egerton and Reese Dunklin, "Two-thirds of Bishops

Let Accused Priests Work," *Dallas Morning News*, June 12, 2002, p. 1A.

[xiii] Dale Neal, "Methodist Clergy Instructed in Sexual Ethics at Conference," *Asheville Citizen-Times*, May 14, 2002, p. 1B.

[xiv] Cal Thomas, "Their Sins only Start with Abuse," *Baltimore Sun*, June 19, 2002, p. 9A.

[xv] James L. Franklin, "Sexual Misconduct Seen as a Serious Problem in Religion," *Boston Globe*, October 23, 1991, p. 24.

[xvi] "Pastors Are People, Too!," *Focus on the Family*, May 1996, p. 7.

[xvii] Teresa Watanabe, "Sex Abuse by Clerics—A Crisis of Many Faiths," *Los Angeles Times*, March 25, 2002, p. A1.

[xviii] Cal Thomas, "Their Sins only Start with Abuse," *Baltimore Sun*, June 19, 2002, p. 9A.

[xix] Terry Mattingly, "Baptists' Traditions Make it Hard to Oust Sex-Abusing Clergy," *Knoxville News-Sentinel*, June 22, 2002, p. C2.

[xx] "Assemblies of God Tackles Problem of Porn Addiction Among Ministers," *Charisma*, January 2001, p. 24.

[xxi] Mark Clayton, "Sex Abuse Spans Spectrum of Churches," *Christian Science Monitor*, April 5, 2002, p. 1.

[xxii] Philip Jenkins, *Pedophiles and Priests* (New York: Oxford University Press), pp. 50 and 81.

[xxiii] Rabbi Arthur Gross Schaefer, "Rabbi Sexual Misconduct: Crying Out for a Communal Response," www.rrc.edu/journal, November 24, 2003.

[xxiv] Roger Lovette, "Religious Leaders Must Learn to Handle Conflict Constructively," *Birmingham News*, April 28, 2002.

[xxv] See www.theawarenesscenter.org/clergyabuse.

[xxvi] Laurie Goodstein, "Ousted Members Say Jehovah's Witnesses' Policy on Abuse Hides Offenses," *New York Times*, August 11, 2002, Section 1, p. 26.

[xxvii] Michael Dobie, "Violation of Trust; When Young Athletes Are Sex-Abuse Victims, Their Coaches Are Often the Culprits," *Newsday*, June 9, 2002, p. C25.

[xxviii] "Sexual Misconduct (ROLES): New Research Therapy Doesn't Deter Sexual Misconduct by Psychologists," *Sex Weekly*, September 15, 1997, pp. 27-28.

[xxix] Michael Dobie, "Violation of Trust," *Newsday*, June 9, 2002, p. C25.

[xxx] Daniel Wishnietsky, "Reported and Unreported Teacher-Student Sexual Harassment," *Journal of Ed Research*, Vol. 3, 1991, pp. 164-69.

[xxxii] Douglas Montero, "Secret Shame of Our Schools: Sexual Abuse of Students Runs Rampant," *New York Post*, July 30, 2001, p. 1.

[xxxiii] "Schools Chancellor: Four Teachers Barred from Classroom," *Associated Press*, June 12, 2003.

[xxxiiii] Charol Shakeshaft and Audrey Cohan, *In loco parentis: Sexual abuse of students in schools, (What administrators should know)*. Report to the U.S. Department of Education, Field Initiated Grants

[xxxv] Ibid.

[xxxvi] Diana Jean Schemo, "Silently Shifting Teachers in Sex Abuse Cases," *New York Times*, June 18, 2002, p. A19.

[xxxvii] Elizabeth Cohen, "Sex Abuse of Students Common; Research Suggests 15% of All Children Harassed," *Press & Sun-Bulletin*, February 10, 2002, p. 1A.

[xxxviii] Berta Delgado and Sarah Talalay, "Sex Cases Increase in Schools; Many Acts of Teacher Misconduct Not Being Reported," *Sun-Sentinel*, June 4, 1995, p. 1A.

[xxxix] The study is in draft form and is not yet available for quotation.

[xl] The dates of the study were April 5-7, 2002. It was reported in Roper Center at University of Connecticut *Public Opinion Online*, Accession Number 0402247. Hart and Teeter Research Companies did the survey.

[xli] The Catholic League took pains to credit the media with fair coverage of the scandal. See the "Executive Summary" of the Catholic League's 2002 *Report on Anti-Catholicism*. It is available online at www.catholicleague.org.

AN OPEN LETTER TO THE JEWISH COMMUNITY

February 4, 2004

I have seen the Mel Gibson movie, "The Passion of the Christ," on two occasions and consider it to be the most moving dramatization of the death of Jesus Christ ever made. It is magnificent beyond words. I stand with those Catholics, Protestants and Jews who have seen the film and do not find it to be anti-Semitic. If I thought it were, I would not hesitate to condemn it. Not everyone has, or will, agree with this assessment. That's fine. What is not fine is the sheer demagoguery that has accompanied some of the criticism.

Last summer, Boston University theology professor Paula Fredriksen said in *The New Republic*, "When violence breaks out, Mel Gibson will have a much higher authority than professors and bishops to answer to." Fredriksen is a self-described "raised-Catholic, Marxist-feminist convert to Orthodox Judaism." She did not say "if violence breaks out"—but "when."

More disturbing than Fredriksen has been Abraham Foxman, national director of the ADL. Foxman recently gained admission to the film when it was previewed in Orlando; he did so by identifying himself as executive director of The Church of the Truth. In a news release, he wrote, "Will the film trigger pogroms against Jews? Our answer is probably not." Which means it may.

And who exactly is it that Foxman has in mind? On January 23, he was quoted 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." I wrote to him on January 26 asking for an apology, but none has been

forthcoming. "To say the film is dangerous because the people who are previewing it are church-going Christians," I wrote, "is an insult to practicing Christians." I added, "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."

This is not an unusual reaction for the ADL. In 1993, when the Passion Play "Jesus Was His Name" was performed in 23 American cities, Rabbi Leon Klenicki, director of the ADL's interfaith department, warned that the "presentation does not contribute to peace." The record will show that not one act of violence occurred in any city.

If history is any guide, there will be no pogroms of any sort following the release of the movie. Leonard Dinnerstein, author of *Antisemitism in America*, has said, "There never have been pogroms in America; there never have been respectable antisemitic political parties in America; and there never have been any federal laws curtailing Jewish opportunities in America." Indeed, Dinnerstein says that "in no Christian country has antisemitism been weaker than it has been in the United States."

This is not to suggest that Jews haven't been the subject of violence in the U.S. Historically, groups like the Ku Klux Klan targeted Jews. It also targeted Catholics and, of course, African Americans. But the claim that Jews need to be especially on guard against roving bands of thugs cannot be sustained.

In the late 1960s, a report was submitted to the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence. The commission, headed by Dr. Milton S. Eisenhower, released its findings in a book titled, *The History of Violence in America*; it was edited by Hugh Davis Graham and Ted Robert Gurr. The principal victims of violence identified in the book are Native Americans, African Americans, Roman Catholics and

labor.

The worst urban riots occurred in the 1830s, 1840s and 1850s. "Among the most important types of riots," the report says, "were labor riots, election riots, antiabolitionist riots, anti-Negro riots, anti-Catholic riots, and riots of various sorts involving the turbulent volunteer firemen's units." Except for the Civil War draft riots, things settled down after this period. But the point to be made is that the Jewish community, albeit small, was not then, or later, among the most likely to be victimized.

Violence against Jews in more recent times has either been waged, or encouraged, by such groups as the Aryan Nation, Christian Identity, National Alliance, National Socialists, Posse Comitatus and Church of the Creator. None of these organizations is remotely Christian and many are indeed hostile to Christians (e.g. Christian Identity and Church of the Creator). The Nation of Islam is another group that is hostile to Jews; it is also hostile to Catholics. Arguably the worst anti-Semitic violence ever to occur—it was certainly in the worst in New York City's history—was the Crown Heights riots of 1991. That this riot had absolutely nothing to do with a Christian animus toward Jews is disputed by no one.

The idea that Christians will attack Jews in the streets after seeing "The Passion of the Christ" is pernicious. Ken Jacobson, associate national director of the ADL, has said, "We have good reason to be seriously concerned about Gibson's plans to retell the Passion. Historically, the Passion—the story of the killing of Jesus—has resulted in the death of Jews." Not in this country it hasn't, and if the ADL wants to qualify its charge by citing examples from the Middle Ages, then it should do so.

Some critics of the film cite concerns stemming from the Holocaust and beyond. Harold Brackman, consultant to the Simon Wiesenthal Center, has said, "It is Christians who bear

the responsibility, after 2000 years of religious-inspired anti-Semitism, to inhibit rather than inflame the excesses of their own haters. When filmmakers with a Christological agenda fail to accept this responsibility, the blood that may result is indeed on their hands." Not only is this kind of inflammatory rhetoric destructive of good Christian-Jewish relations, it makes one wonder—if Christian hatred of Jews is so visceral—why have there been no pogroms in the U.S. in over 200 years?

More sensible were those American Jews who signed the 2000 statement, "Dabru Emet." Although they properly noted that Christianity has at times fueled anti-Semitism, they nonetheless concluded, "Nazism was not a Christian phenomenon." Former New York City Mayor Ed Koch said it best: "It should never be said that Christians were responsible for the Holocaust—Nazis were. Blaming Christians would be as unjustified as holding Jews accountable for the death of Jesus. Individuals were responsible in both situations."

Moreover, Christians are no strangers to violence, either. Yehuda Bauer, former director of the Holocaust Research Institute at Yad Vashem in Jerusalem, and retired professor of Holocaust Studies at the Hebrew University, estimates that 25 million non-Jews died in the Holocaust. I hasten to add that these victims, most of whom were Christians, were not selected for death because of their ethnic or religious status. This makes what happened to Jews of unique and surpassing importance. But it is wrong to discount the suffering of Christians. Furthermore, it is estimated that 70 million Christians have been murdered in the past 2000 years, 45 million of which occurred in the last century alone!

If "The Passion of the Christ" is so troubling, then why hasn't there been an uproar over the recent film, "The Gospel of John"? After all, it uses virtually every word of the Gospel, including words deemed offensive by critics of the Gibson film. Why was there no big hullabaloo over "Jesus

Christ Superstar"?; it depicted what one reviewer called a "demonic Caiaphas." Is it because Mel Gibson is a so-called traditional Catholic? And if so, what exactly does this have to do with proclamations of violence? For Foxman, it is not hard to connect the dots: "I think he's [Gibson] infected—seriously infected—with some very, very serious anti-Semitic views. [Gibson's] got classical anti-Semitic views."

If the movie is likely to engender violence, then we should expect that when people finish watching it, they will be in a rage. But no one who has seen the film has experienced anything like anger. Even Foxman has acknowledged as much: "As the lights came up, the silence was etched with stifled sobs and tears. The 3,000 Christian pastors, leaders, students and others who attended the preview of the film's graphic portrayal of the events leading up to the Crucifixion were visibly moved by the images that brought them closer than they may ever have been to bearing witness to the Passion of Jesus." Not exactly the kind of sentiment we would expect from Christians ready to act on their latent anti-Semitism.

Some, like Rabbi Marvin Hier of the Simon Wiesenthal Center, have said the movie has already provoked anti-Semitism; he cites bigoted phone calls and letters. But it must also be said that hate speech has been directed at the Catholic League as well. Indeed, at a rally against the movie, I had a Brooklyn rabbi tell me to my face that "your gospels are pornographic." Now I would no more blame Jews for this anti-Catholic outburst than Jews victimized by Catholic bigots should blame Catholics.

No doubt there will be anti-Semitic bigots in the Christian community who will like "The Passion of the Christ." But they will like it for all the wrong reasons, none of which finds support in contemporary Christian thought. The idea that all Jews at the time of Christ's death clamored for his crucifixion is historically wrong and patently bigoted: those who ascribe to notions of collective guilt are demented. The

idea that any Jew today is somehow responsible for the behavior of some Jews 2000 years ago is even more insane.

Foxman, along with ADL consultant Rabbi Gary Bretton-Granatoor, said after viewing the film, "What we saw makes a mockery of the teachings of the Second Vatican Council." I will stand with Catholic theologian Michael Novak: "Gibson's film is wholly consistent with the Second Vatican Council's presentation of the relations of Judaism and the Christian Church." Let it be said that reasonable people can disagree about this, but what cannot be tolerated is casting aspersions on "church-going Christians."

I am no stranger to the fight against anti-Semitism. I have joined with the ADL in publicly denouncing Louis Farrakhan; I have gone to Harlem at the request of the Jewish Action Alliance to condemn the hatred of the late Nation of Islam official, Khalid Muhammad; I have joined Norman Siegel, previously of the New York Civil Liberties Union, in denouncing the anti-Semitism that occurred during the controversy over the Brooklyn Museum of Art (he denounced the anti-Catholicism that took place); when a Jewish-led boycott of the Jewish Museum was organized to protest art trivializing the Holocaust, I asked Catholics to support it; in December I joined with Norm Siegel and others to publicly condemn a rash of violence against synagogues in Brooklyn and Queens. And on January 20, at the behest of Americans for a Safe Israel, I wrote a letter to Israeli Knesset members pledging support for "a safe and secure Israel."

Before closing, please understand that many Christians deeply resent the kinds of movies Hollywood has been releasing over the last few decades. They especially resent the long list of anti-Christian films that have been made (most of which have been explicitly anti-Catholic). And now that they finally have a film they can be proud of, some are calling them bigots, if not thugs.

Christian-Jewish relations have improved markedly over the past few decades, and in this regard no one has been more influential than Pope John Paul II. It would not only be unfortunate—it would be a travesty—if the reaction to a film about the death of Jesus were to undo the good that has been done. I pray it will not.

ADL INSULTS CHRISTIANS OVER MEL GIBSON FILM; APOLOGY REQUESTED

ADL INSULTS CHRISTIANS OVER MEL GIBSON FILM; APOLOGY REQUESTED

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

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

OPUS DEI: FACT AND FICTION

The Dan Brown book, The Da Vinci Code, is a best-selling work of fiction that discusses a real-life Catholic organization, Opus Dei. To help separate fact from fiction, we asked officials at Opus Dei to write a short article on this subject. Herewith their reply.

Founded in 1928 by St. Josemaría Escrivá, Opus Dei (Latin for "work of God") has a mission of spreading Christ's teaching on the universal call to holiness. A personal prelature, it works in dioceses around the world, with the approval of local bishops. Opus Dei has been the subject of several myths, made popular recently by the *Da Vinci Code*.

Myth: Opus Dei has a political agenda.

Fact: The only thing Opus Dei has to say about politics is what the Church says, and many of the Church's social teachings leave room for different opinions on concrete political questions. In these opinionable matters, Opus Dei members make their own decisions just like other faithful

Catholics. But you won't understand Opus Dei until you realize that politics—whether civil or ecclesial—just isn't its institutional focus. Opus Dei's focus is on providing spiritual guidance to help people deepen their faith and integrate it with their daily life.

Myth: Opus Dei is a secret society.

Fact: The Opus Dei Prelature publishes the names of all its priests and all its international and regional directors. Like dioceses and parishes, it does not publish lay members' names. Neither do health clubs for that matter, and people surely deserve as much privacy in their spiritual affairs as they do in medical matters. Members, however, are more than happy to tell you of their membership and what Opus Dei is all about.

While we're at it, we can confirm that the Pope's spokesman, Joaquin Navarro-Valls, is a member, but we would like to dispel once and for all the rumors that Louis Freeh, Antonin Scalia, Clarence Thomas, and Mel Gibson are members.

Myth: Opus Dei brainwashes, coerces, or pressures members and potential members.

Fact: Opus Dei has complete respect for people's freedom. It's ludicrous to think that the Pope and bishops worldwide would support an institution that didn't. In this era of relativism, there are plenty of people who will call teaching the faith, giving spiritual guidance, and being a Christian witness “brainwashing,” “coercion,” and “recruiting” or “proselytism.” Nowadays consenting adults are free of criticism for doing almost anything—anything apparently except trying to help people grow in their faith and practice it in their daily life.

Myth: Opus Dei makes its members practice dangerous corporal mortifications.

Fact: Each Lent, the Church reminds people that sacrifice is part of the spiritual life. To help its members follow this teaching, Opus Dei encourages them to make small sacrifices,

such as persevering in their work or listening to those in need. The Catholic tradition also includes other penances, such as fasting and the use of a cilice or discipline, as means for deepening one's union with Christ. Many saints, including Opus Dei's founder, St. Josemaría Escrivá, have practiced such penances in a heroic way. Some celibate members of Opus Dei and of other Church institutions freely follow some of these customs, though in a mitigated way. They do so subject to the advice of their spiritual director and in a way that is never harmful to their health, completely unlike the *Da Vinci Code*'s distorted representation. These kinds of sacrifices are certainly not a focus in Opus Dei, which emphasizes integrating faith with the activities of everyday life.

Myth: Opus Dei's status as a "personal prelature" cuts it loose from oversight by the bishops.

Fact: Like a diocese, a personal prelature is overseen by the Holy See. Additionally, Opus Dei receives permission from local bishops before starting apostolic work in their dioceses and keeps diocesan bishops informed about its activities. The guidance it offers its members pertains only to matters connected with its mission, which is educating people about the universal call to holiness and helping them fulfill this call in their daily life. The members of the prelature remain members of their diocese and are subject to their local bishop just like other Catholics.

Myth: With all the criticism, Opus Dei must be doing something wrong.

Fact: Every successful organization has its critics, from Coca-Cola to the Catholic Church itself. As for Opus Dei's critics, anyone who does not believe in Christ, the Church's teachings, or loyalty to the Pope could easily have "issues" with Opus Dei, since it accepts all these things. It's also common that an organization's critics have personal reasons for misinterpreting things—even with good intentions. What's

more relevant than the criticism is the fact that millions of people around the world know and love Opus Dei, including the Pope and a great number of bishops. This is because Opus Dei gives so much help to ordinary people who want to connect their faith with daily life.

For further information, contact the Opus Dei Information Office at info@opusdei.org or (212) 532-3570.

TOLERATING SEXUAL ABUSE IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

The board of directors of the Boys Choir of Harlem voted unanimously January 14 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 issued the following comments on the matter to the press:

“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.”

LAST-DITCH ATTEMPT TO SMEAR BISHOP MURPHY

Laura A. Ahearn held a press conference on February 11 in Stony Brook, Long Island, the purpose of which was to charge Rockville Centre Bishop William F. Murphy of conspiring to squash a criminal investigation of child sexual abuse. Ahearn, director of Parents for Megan’s Law, says she spent a week in Boston researching Bishop Murphy’s role in the Boston sex

abuse scandal. She claims to have evidence of his wrongdoing while serving in Boston.

Catholic League president William Donohue wasn't impressed:

"Laura A. Ahearn postures herself as a tireless champion of children whose only motive is justice. No doubt the social worker has done some good work. But her resume also has all the marks of a zealot.

"It did not sit well with Ahearn when the Diocese of Rockville Centre did not award her a contract for her workshops. More important, Ahearn previously scoffed at the Church's claim that certain reporting laws would compromise the confessional. Also telling is her unwillingness to cite the role homosexuals have played in the scandal. Now anyone who treats the sanctity of the confessional in a cavalier fashion is no friend of the Catholic Church. Moreover, anyone who maintains that homosexuals did not play a major role in the scandal is living in utter denial.

"It is striking that the report issued by Massachusetts Attorney General Thomas Reilly on the Boston Archdiocese didn't lay a glove on Bishop Murphy. We are now to believe that a woman from Long Island, armed with her masters in social work, has found evidence of Murphy's culpability that escaped the army of lawyers working for the Massachusetts Attorney General. And it only took her a week to do so!

"When Ahearn addresses her friends in Voice of the Faithful on February 12, she will find a sympathetic audience. But unless she is really living in la-la-land, she should not expect most Catholics to pay her any heed. It's time Ahearn, and everyone else out to get Murphy, packed it in."

HECKMATE: NEWSDAY AND L.I. VOICE OF THE FAITHFUL

Catholic League president William Donohue explained in a news release why a report on *Newsday* and Voice of the Faithful was sent to every pastor on Long Island (the report is available on the league's [website](#)):

“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.”