

THE NEW REPUBLIC LIBELS MEL GIBSON

In the July 28-August 4 edition of *The New Republic*, Paula Fredriksen has a lengthy article on the controversy surrounding the Mel Gibson movie, "The Passion." Commenting on it today is Catholic League president William Donohue:

"Working with an unauthorized script of 'The Passion,' Paula Fredriksen has declared the movie to be anti-Semitic. Neither she, nor any of her friends who read an early draft of the screenplay, have seen the movie. Nor have they explained how they obtained the purloined script. But that doesn't matter—what matters is that she has libeled Mel Gibson.

"Fredriksen maintains there are historical inaccuracies in the script. Having seen the film, it would be more honest to say that 'The Passion,' like other renditions of the last twelve hours of Jesus' life, has elements in it that some scholars might question. But this is not her point. Her point is that Gibson has not acceded to her request to 'revise his script substantially.' As if he should. Her arrogance is evident again when she says that she and her colleagues 'functioned with a naiveté that is peculiar to educators: the belief that, once an error is made plain, a person will prefer the truth.' How reassuring it must be for Mel to know that if he wants the truth, all he has to do is give Paula a ring.

"Fredriksen is a demagogue. For only a demagogue would write, 'When violence breaks out, Mel Gibson will have a much higher authority than professors and bishops to answer to.' Note she does not say *if* violence breaks out, but *when*. How disappointed she will be when none occurs. For the record, James Shapiro, in his work, *Oberammergau: The Troubling Story of the World's Most Famous Play*, has written that the Passion play has never been directly linked to anti-Semitic violence.

Never.

"I would agree with Jesuit Father William J. Fulco, a professor of ancient Mediterranean studies and translator of the movie into Aramaic and Latin, that 'there is no hint of deicide' in the film. But this will obviously not do for those bent on discrediting it: they will 'find' anti-Semitism. They don't even have to see it to hate it—they have truth on their side."