

# **“THE PASSION” CONTINUES TO EXCITE**

Mel Gibson's "The Passion of the Christ" continues to be the source of controversy. Attempts by three Jewish brothers in France to ban the film did not succeed in court, but this did not stop the Benlolo brothers—Patrick, Gerard and Jean-Marc—from appealing the decision. The movie was censored in Israel; it was the only nation in the world to ban the film (Shapira Films, which has the Israeli distribution rights, refused to release "The Passion").

For about a year now, critics of the film have been saying it would spur violence against Jews. Events have proven them wrong: two months after the release of the movie, not one act of violence was reported. It needs to be said that the movie's critics were particularly certain that Jews would not escape violence overseas. Indeed, Poland, France, Russia and the Arab nations were cited over and over again as places bound to witness pogroms. But not one act of thuggery has occurred anywhere in the world.

It must also be said that those who made these extravagant claims, including many prominent Jews, have not apologized. They should. Recall that William Donohue wrote to Abraham Foxman of the ADL requesting an apology for his anti-Christian remark. Here is what Foxman said: "[Gibson is] hawking it on a commercial crusade to the churches of this country." For Foxman, it is not secularists who are the problem for Jews. Nor is it lax Christians. On the contrary, it is those practicing Christians who are a menace.

This is all rather strange given that it was atheistic Nazism and atheistic Communism that murdered Jews by the millions in the last century. And today it is Muslim extremists who want to murder Jews. Yet it is church-going Christians whom the ADL

fears the most. This is not only historically erroneous, it smacks of a bias so deep as to be impervious to reason.

In an online survey of those who have seen "The Passion," Regent University professor William Brown found that 92 percent said the movie made them think about their relationship with God; and 90 percent said the movie gave them "a better understanding of God's love toward mankind." Not exactly the kind of sentiment we would expect from people likely to punish Jews.

Then there is the survey by the Institute for Jewish and Community Research (IJCR). In a poll of 1,003 adults about the film, 83 percent said it did not make them blame contemporary Jews for Christ's death; only 2 percent said the film made them more likely to hold today's Jews responsible; and 9 percent said the film made them less likely to do so.

All of which shocked the president of the IJCR, Gary Tobin: "I did not expect so many people would say that, even if they believed Jews were responsible for the death of Christ 2,000 years ago, they don't hold Jews today responsible." Tobin also said the movie "is clearly filled with anti-Semitic views and images." It was for this reason, he said, he "didn't expect people to have a more favorable impression of Jews."

But if the movie was, in fact, so "clearly filled with anti-Semitic views and images," then why was this fact apparently lost on those Christians who saw the movie? Of course, it is entirely possible that Tobin's perception of what constitutes anti-Semitism is so skewed as to create problems for him that are not shared by others.

In any event, not only has the movie not generated hate crimes against Jews, it has actually motivated murderers, robbers and Nazis to confess to their crimes.

Detectives in Texas say the death of a 19-year-old woman originally ruled a suicide has turned into a murder case after

a repentant man who watched the movie confessed to killing her because she was carrying his child. In Florida, a man who robbed a bank of \$25,000 in 2001 walked into the Palm Beach County sheriff's office and confessed to his crime. The robber told a detective that it was his emotional response to the film that spurred him to surrender. And a Norwegian neo-Nazi confessed to two bombings a decade ago after a pang of repentance triggered by watching the movie. His lawyer said, "The trigger that made him go to police and confess was that movie."

So not only has "The Passion of the Christ" not spawned violence against Jews, it has served as a catalyst for contemporary Nazis to confess to their crimes. Had there been any violence, it is a sure bet the media would have broadcasted it all over the world. But news stories on criminals who turned themselves in after seeing the film were few and far between.

The Catholic League is proud to have led the fight in defense of Mel Gibson. That Mel appreciates what we did cannot be understated: the conversations he has had with Bill Donohue give evidence of his gratitude.