

VATICAN SPOKESMAN: "THE PASSION" IS NOT ANTI-SEMITIC

Joaquín Navarro-Valls, the Director of the Holy See's Press Office, said yesterday that "The Passion of the Christ" was "a cinematographic transcription of the Gospels. If it were anti-Semitic, the Gospels would also be so." He added that the pope would have criticized the movie if it were bigoted against Jews, but, he declared, there is "nothing anti-Semitic about it." The Vatican spokesman made his comments in reply to Riccardo Di Segni, chief rabbi of Rome, who had asked the Vatican to formally condemn the Mel Gibson movie.

Catholic League president William Donohue was pleased:

"This will now settle the issue for most Catholics—the movie is not anti-Semitic. Naturally, there will always be some, most especially dissident theologians, nuns and priests, who will reject the Vatican's understanding of the film. But then again they have a long track record of rejecting lots of things the Vatican says. It would be a mistake for the millions of Catholics who have embraced this movie to allow the dissidents to distract them from the beauty of the film.

"For some Jews, this may not sit too well. That would be unfortunate, because the last thing Catholics want is bad relations with Jews. Those Jews who find the movie problematic should be treated with respect. Given what has happened to Jews throughout history, including at the hands of many Christians, it is not surprising that many Jews today would be wary of any movie that deals with the death of Jesus. But an honest dialogue between Catholics and Jews cannot proceed if Catholics—convinced the movie is a spiritual exercise absent anti-Semitism—are to pretend there isn't an honest disagreement about the movie.

“At the end of the day, however, disagreements between Catholics and Jews need not take on any greater significance than the ordinary family quarrel. It is up to the major players on both sides to see to it that our common friendship transcends any discord about this matter.”