

# Pope, Graham said to like Gibson's movie: *The Passion of the Christ*

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Continuing to preview his renamed *The Passion of the Christ* movie to people expected to praise it, actor-producer Mel Gibson got plaudits from Billy Graham, who was moved to tears, and reportedly secured favor from Pope John Paul II.

The Vatican declined to confirm the reports, avoiding being viewed as giving the film a commercial endorsement. According to the widely circulated reports, the 83-year-old pontiff viewed the film on DVD in his private apartments in December with his secretary, Polish Archbishop Stanislaw Dziwisz. His verdict: "It is as it was."

Jewish groups and some Catholic scholars have criticized the graphic film depiction of Jesus' last hours, contending that it will fuel anti-Semitism by reviving the allegation that the Jews killed Christ, which was formally rejected by the Second Vatican Council in 1965. The council's landmark document said that what happened in Christ's death "cannot be charged against all the Jews without distinction then alive, nor against the Jews of today."

Gibson, a conservative Catholic who does not accept many of the teachings of Vatican II, said in an interview with the Fox news channel last January that the film is not meant to upset Jews but "to just tell the truth." The film, which has dialogue in Hebrew, Latin and Aramaic, is scheduled for U.S. release on Ash Wednesday, February 25.

Augustine Di Noia, an American Dominican monsignor who is undersecretary of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, told the Zenit news agency that he saw "absolutely nothing anti-Semitic or anti-Jewish" about the film. "The film neither exaggerates nor downplays the role of Jewish authorities and legal proceedings in the condemnation of Jesus. But precisely because it presents a comprehensive account of what might be called the 'calculus of blame' in the passion and death of Christ, the film would be more likely to quell anti-Semitism in its audiences than to excite," the prelate said. -*Religion News Service*