Culture

News



Mel Gibson speaks from Malibu, California, in a video presented at the Sept. 10 rally in Chicago hosted by the Coalition for Canceled Priests. (NCR screenshot)



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In a recent video appearance, Hollywood actor Mel Gibson espoused anti-Vatican II views and endorsed a new organization for so-called "canceled" priests whose bishops have removed them from ministry for defying church authorities or expressing controversial opinions.

Gibson, also a producer and director who is reportedly filming a sequel to his 2004 blockbuster "The Passion of the Christ," attacked bishops as "hirelings" and said he agreed with Archbishop Carlo Maria Viganò, a former Vatican ambassador to the U.S. who has taken to writing conspiratorial missives alleging a parallel counterfeit church was set up after the Second Vatican Council to eclipse the real church.

"And my question is, who's hiring [the bishops]? I don't think it's Jesus. Is it [Pope] Francis? Who's hiring Francis? Is it Pachamama?" Gibson said at one point in the rambling five-minute video, where he rarely looks at the camera while railing against the post-conciliar church.

"There was nothing wrong" with the Catholic Church before Vatican II's reforms, Gibson said, adding: "It didn't need to be fixed. It was doing pretty well."

Gibson's remote endorsement provided some star power for a Sept. 10 rally that the Coalition for Canceled Priests held at Lincoln Park in Chicago. The event, advertised as "a rally and rosary of reparation," featured right-wing Catholic radio hosts David Gray and Jason Jones as speakers.

The event's other headline personality was Fr. James Altman, the rogue priest from the Diocese of La Crosse, Wisconsin, whose bishop issued a decree in early July removing him from parish ministry and restricting his priestly faculties because of his divisive style.

Altman, who was also ordered to meet monthly with his diocesan vicar for clergy and undergo a monthlong retreat for spiritual renewal, showed he intends to continue defying his bishop. While speaking at the rally, he ripped up a piece of paper.

"Here's what you can do with your decree," Altman said. "Toilet paper is worth more than your decree."

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The Coalition for Canceled Priests was incorporated June 15, 2021, in Illinois. Fr. John Lovell, a priest whose ministry has been restricted by the Diocese of Rockford, Illinois, is identified as a co-founder of the group.

Several dozen people, many of them holding signs, attended the Sept. 10 rally. They cheered loudly as Altman referred to bishops as "monsters in miters" and called on them to "repent" for their support of vaccines against the coronavirus.

Altman also made a thinly veiled anti-gay slur aimed at the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops; invoked those who hid Anne Frank and her family from the Nazis as he argued against having so-called blind obedience to bishops; and accused Pope Francis of betraying Jesus like Judas.

"He is no longer the vicar of Christ. He threw out that title," said Altman, who donated $100,000 to the Coalition for Canceled Priests in late July.

In his video, Gibson said he would also "throw something in the hat" to show his support, adding that he personally knows "many priests who have been canceled."

"I'm really sorry about that. It's a really grave injustice, and a really kind of white martyrdom, and it's nothing new," Gibson said, adding that the supposed persecution of faithful priests is "a really deep symptom that afflicts the church, and that did not happen overnight."

"The Passion of the Christ" was a box office hit, generating more than $600 million worldwide, but was not without controversy, as the film's portrayal of Jews and Gibson's connections to hardline Catholic traditionalism raised concerns about anti-Semitic themes in the movie. Those criticisms took on new salience when Gibson made overt anti-Semitic statements during a 2006 arrest for drunken driving in Malibu, California.

Over the past year, various published reports have indicated that Gibson is working on a sequel to "The Passion of the Christ" that could bring back some of the original cast, including actor Jim Caviezel as Jesus.