

The minimum wage. They justify this action in part by citing a 2005 study by IAHN

else. If they can't do that, they cut back on hours or let people

commercial aircraft industry is not for the fainthearted.

The market quickly judged

Opinion

Bishop McCormack's sins will be televised tonight

Do you believe the survivors or do you believe me?" The question left me in stunned silence, coming as it did from my bishop, John McCormack of Manchester, some two years after the sexual abuse scandal unfolded. I had just presented McCormack, late of Boston, with a statement by Paul Cultrera, a survivor of Joseph Birmingham, about McCormack's lies to him.

It now happens that a documentary about Cultrera, "Hand of God," airing tonight at 10 p.m. on New Hampshire Public Television as part of PBS' "Frontline," will give everyone a chance to judge for themselves before answering McCormack's question. The film, made by Paul's brother Joe, recounts the courage, spirit and laugh-out-loud humor of the entire family's recovery from trauma.

But it is McCormack's knee-jerk reaction that day

when asked to acknowledge his duplicity and complicity in enabling abuse that is key. Emblematic of bishops in general, he offers spin about "mistakes and inadequacies," usually in the passive voice; the plain, simple truth of criminally endangering children, in any common sense understanding of that term, is vigorously denied.

"Forgive me, Father, for mistakes were made," is the usual rendering of accountability, vs. "I transferred priests to cover up sexual abuse," or "I withheld information from the authorities," or "I did not tell the consulting psychiatrist about an admission of rape." Any review of the vast archive on www.bishopaccountability.org confirms the record in the bishops' own words, and also exposes memory losses of astounding proportions in their many court depositions. Willful blindness, conscious ignorance and flagrant indif-

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ference to the dangers priests posed to children, in the words of New Hampshire's attorney general. The resulting evil is the concrete, painful scarring of innocent flesh, not some banal abstraction like the "passion of the church" in which the bishop is the victim.

But from chanceries, we always get the benign generalized language of public relations vs. the particulars of individual culpability. The open sore in the church today is that no bishop, archbishop or cardinal has endured consequences for an extended crime wave beyond promotion to higher office.

So, the centuries-long clerical mindset of exemption and privilege is essentially unchanged despite policies, procedures, apologies, and financial settlements that somehow never,

never admit liability. There will be no healing without the full truth, and Cultrera's detective work underscores the continuing obstacles to learning it. The last third of the documentary concerns his interactions with McCormack in 1994, when he reported the abuse to him. The result is a searing indictment of McCormack's integrity, made clear to Cultrera only because the Birmingham documents were released in 2002.

Since bishops know that there would be no scandal without access to the documents, they continue to fight a page-by-page battle to keep the secrets hidden — now appealing court decisions in Bridgeport, Conn., Los Angeles, and Springfield, Mass., to name a few dioceses — because the history is so damning.

They need to stop obstructing the release of documents with bogus 1st Amendment defenses so that the truth may set them free, even if it is incriminating.

Prelates falsely denying charges about their conduct are not limited to sexual abuse matters, as the recent resignation of Poland's Archbishop Stanislaw Wielgus proves. Wielgus' cooperation with the Soviet-era Polish secret police was exposed only because documents were made public.

Hierarchs do lie, speak dangerous half-truths, and strain the gnats of language and interpretation to evade responsibility for their willful actions. They must be held accountable, even if only in the court of public opinion — as through a powerful documentary like "Hand of God." Otherwise, a corrosive atmosphere lingers, and wounds fail to heal.

Clericalism thrives in secrecy, and unfortunately, bishops today still cling to both. Most across the country refuse to publish the names, assignment records and photos of all credibly accused priests, living and dead, to help

survivors understand that they are not the only ones, which is something Cultrera desperately needed but was denied him.

There are cases where former abusers were found employed in public schools, working at amusement parks, or even recycled as mental health professionals. A serious commitment to protecting children demands the disclosure of these names, past and future.

Again, the clerical impetus to protect the institution trumps the need of the truth for survivors, Catholics, and indeed for the common good. "Hand of God" vividly confirms the point.

Which is why my answer to McCormack, reinforced after viewing the film, is that I unreservedly believe Paul Cultrera, not a bishop who prefers spin to transparency.

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