

Del.icio.us | Digg | Print Article | E-Mail Article | Change Font Size 

McAllen theater shows controversial documentary Hand of God

Jeremy Roebuck

February 18, 2007 - 11:35PM

It took him almost a month to find an audience in the Rio Grande Valley. But once he did, filmmaker Joe Cultrera discovered a receptive audience.

Cultrera, the director of Hand of God, a feature-length documentary detailing sexual abuse in the Roman Catholic Church, answered questions from an audience of nearly 300 on Sunday during a special screening of his film at Cine El Rey in McAllen.

"To me, this is a church," Cultrera said to the audience. "Church is a body of people gathering together for a common belief. Making this film is one of the most spiritual things I have ever done."

The filmmaker and his brother agreed to come to South Texas after the documentary — which ran as part of the Public Broadcasting System program Frontline — failed to air during its primetime Jan. 16 time slot on local affiliate KMBH. The local PBS station, which receives a major portion of its funding from the Roman Catholic Diocese of Brownsville, eventually ran it late that night as part of PBS' direct programming feed.

In a letter sent to local media soon after that delayed airing, station general manager Monsignor Pedro Briseño — local Bishop Raymundo Peña's appointee to the position at the station — denied any attempts at censorship and offered to order copies for anyone who wanted one.

But the fact it didn't air during the regular Frontline time slot caused many to question whether the decision had been politically motivated.

Gerald Brazier, president of Call to Action-Rio Grande Valley, the local chapter of a national Catholic watchdog group, organized Sunday's special screening and still questions why KMBH did not show the film as scheduled.

"Their best course of action at this point is to stay silent on what appears to be censorship on their part," he said, speaking of the diocese. "In the long term, I would hope (Sunday's showing) raised consciousness about the issue."

The film tells the story of Paul Cultrera, the filmmaker's brother and a sexual abuse victim of a neighborhood priest. After keeping his secret for several decades, he finally admits the abuse to his family and begins to take measure of its affect on his life, deciding he can no longer remain a devout Catholic.

While the film rolled, audience members sat in front of a large sign that urged Bishop Peña to "do the right thing" and release the names of all Valley priests accused of sexual abuse.

During a question and answer session afterward, Paul Contrera urged those watching to take that message directly to the Valley's clergymen.

"If the church is going to change, it's up to you who care about it to change things," he said.

Edinburg resident Jesse de la Rosa, 48, was glad for the opportunity to see the film. Whether or not it reflected poorly on the Catholic Church, he called KMBH's decision not to air it a mistake.



"It was just so disappointing," de la Rosa said. "It only added fuel to all the distrust surrounding this issue."

The Rev. David Jackson, a priest at Prince of Peace in Lyford and St. Anthony's in Raymondville, found the message important even though he disagreed with some of the imagery used in the film.

"I was disappointed it didn't run," he said. "I think the issue should be addressed. It's still alive today and should be discussed."

But for Cine El Rey owner Luis Muñoz, hosting the film and subsequent debate was more important that coming out on either side of the issue.

"The film is not an indictment on faith, but an indictment on human weakness," Muñoz said. "And I'd welcome any other group on any side to consider El Rey the Valley's forum."

Jeremy Roebuck covers law enforcement and general assignments for The Monitor. You can reach him at  (956) 683-4437 . For this and more local stories, visit www.themonitor.com.



The Rev. David Jackson, who preaches at churches in Raymondville and Lyford, talks about his impression of the documentary Hand of God after a screening Sunday afternoon at Cine El Rey in McAllen. - Nathan Lambrecht/The Monitor

\$510,000 More for Under \$1,698
Think You Pay Too Much for Your Home?

Calculate New Payment

Bad Credit OK

© 2006 LowerMyBills, Inc.

Click Alab 3.00 Click Good

Yellow Pages

Search:

Enter name or type of business

Location:

Enter city & state, or zip code

AP Video



Celebs Turn Out for Mardi Gras



Missing Hikers Rescued Off Mount Hood



Fight Nicole Body

Tag Cloud

Most Popular Stories

- Parishioners say Deacon's comments blame parents for sex abuses
- Omar Guerrero's transfer from Mexico was speedy, but not unusual
- PSJA says McAllen annexation impossible
- Omar Guerrero denied bond, some charges remain up in air
- Police investigate stabbing at popular dance club
- Omar heads back to hospital with chest pains
- UNDER OUR NOSES: Omar Guerrero hid across border; sex allegation details emerge
- Donna suspends coach over drug arrest
- Does Texas need slot machines?

Hig

- Th
- Ni
- hi
- al
- Th
- be
- ct
- Th
- ne
- Th
- in
- pc
- Th
- sv

Ads by Google

Domino's Pizza - \$9.99

Medium 1-Topping Cheesy GarlicBread Pizza - Order Online Today!
Dominos.com

The New York Times

Stay Informed! Save 50% on Fast &Convenient Delivery in LA
www.nytimes.com

New Homes - Mcallen, TX

Compare New Homes from LeadingBuilders. Get 1% Back - Learn How!
www.iNest.com

Buying or Selling a Home

Your choice is simple! Our agentsmake the process smooth for you.
ReMax1stChoice.themonitor.com

Click to vote

Recommend this story?

Yes

No

The online vote:

Add your comments

Verification

Code: 379ba

Enter

Verification:

Your name:

Enter your comment here

**Your
comment:**

*By submitting this form, you agree to this site's **terms of service**.*

Submit