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One family's story of betrayal

January
17

I watched [Hand of God](#) last night on PBS' Frontline. It's a powerful documentary that pulls no punches and was, at times, difficult to watch.

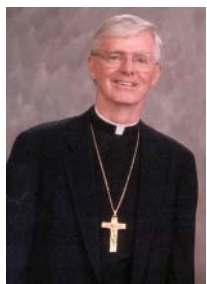
It's the story of one man who was molested by his parish priest, lived with it for 30 years and finally took on the Archdiocese of Boston.

What stood out to me about the film was that the abusive priest, Joseph Birmingham, does not come across as the true villain. He's a monster, of course, a deranged figure who abused dozens of boys. He died before Paul Cultrera, his victim and the focus of the film, was ready to face what happened.

The real bad guy in Hand of God is another priest, John McCormack. He was the head of personnel for the archdiocese who covered up for Birmingham and other molesters, moving them from parish to parish to escape their accusers.

Today, he is [bishop](#) of Manchester, N.H.

As the details of Boston's sex-abuse scandal came out in 2002, many people [called](#) for McCormack to resign. The Manchester Union Leader ran a front-page editorial headlined: "For the Good of the Church, Bishop Should Step Aside."



But McCormack remains (that's his picture on the diocese website).

As the film progresses, Cultrera and his brother, Joe, who made the film, become increasingly hostile toward the Catholic Church itself. They basically dismiss the church's leadership as a big fraud, top to bottom. They wonder how their parents can still go to Mass. Many Catholics, I'm sure, will find this part of the film difficult to take.

How much slack the Cultreras should get as a result of their experience will have to be determined by each viewer.

One final note: The website of the Diocese of Manchester says nothing about the controversy that has dogged McCormack. It describes his background like this:

"In 1984, Cardinal Bernard Law appointed him Secretary for Ministerial Personnel in the Archdiocese of Boston's administrative Cabinet to provide oversight and planning for the institutions and offices of the archdiocese that dealt with seminarians, priests, deacons, and religious and lay ministers. He was ordained a bishop and appointed as an Auxiliary Bishop of Boston in 1995, and served Cardinal Law as regional bishop for the South Region of the Archdiocese.

Pope John Paul II appointed him the ninth Bishop of Manchester on July 21, 1998."

This entry was posted on Wednesday, January 17th, 2007 at 11:37 am by [Gary Stern](#).
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