

TRANSIENT REPORTER

CHEMILUMINESCENT THOUGHTS ON SCIENCE, CULTURE AND SOCIETY
(EMITTED BY A KOREAN BOY LOST IN THE CONCRETE BOWELS OF GREATER LOS ANGELES)

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THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 15, 2007

Hand of God

"I'm a man set apart. I'm somebody different."

So says Father Anthony Laurano, in the PBS Frontline documentary, "Hand of God," which aired recently.

This a film made by Joe Cultrera about his brother Paul who, as a child, was sexually abused by a Catholic priest named Joseph Birmingham.

You can watch it in its entirety [here](#).

Because the filmmaker is also a member of the family, there is an intimate quality to this film - the victim and the other family members trust him, and the occasional roughness of the editing, not to mention the intellectual overreach, somehow makes it all the more compelling and real. His parents are immediately recognizable archetypes - his mother one of those sweet lovely women, his father the sort of sharp-edged, uptight (especially about sexual matters) man of his time, but always fundamentally decent and honest. We've all met these people somewhere, or visited their houses. Aunts and uncles, grandparents, friend's families. Catholics down to a tee.

What is truly astounding - leaving aside the nature of the crime itself, and the disturbing symbiotic relationship between pedophiles and the Church - is what the filmmaker refers to as the "shocking arrogance" of the clergy. Somehow, "shocking arrogance" isn't enough - somehow the phrase doesn't do justice to the self-entitlement, the self-regard, the self-importance of these men (and I'm talking about Catholic priests in general, not just the pedophiles).

The above-quoted Fr Laurano also says this:

"A man of God should be accepted by a community. He should be revered. He should be feared. He should be listened to. (Smiling) No father is ever accepted by the children."

Fr Laurano turns out to have been molesting boys at least

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since 1968. In 2006, he was charged with raping a retarded 30 year old man (a neighbor). He managed to do this while free on personal recognizance awaiting trial for molesting an 8 year old boy twice on the same day in 1991. The judge freed him again.

Who could make this stuff up?

I am reminded of an earlier case in Texas involving a certain Father Rudolph Kos who had been molesting boys for many years, before finally being brought to trial in 1993. Despite several reports of the good Father's behavior, the diocese acted as they always do in such matters - they gave him toothless warnings, moved him from one parish to another, sent him to a counseling center. The jury - angry at the behavior of the church - awarded the plaintiffs (eleven boys - now men) \$110 million in damages. Monsignor Robert Rehkemper, the second-in-command in the diocese, was clearly furious with the judgment. Here are some of his choice comments.

He blamed the parents:

No one ever says anything about what the role of the parents was in all this. They more properly should have known because they're closer to the kids. Parents have the prime responsibility to look after their kids. I don't want to judge them one way or the other, but it doesn't appear they were very concerned about their kids.

He blamed the victims:

I'm sure some of the kids were damaged, but I think the damage might have happened even without Father Kos, you see. They had problems even before they knew Father Kos, many of them.

He blamed them some more:

[The victims] knew what was right and what was wrong. Anybody who reaches the age of reason shares responsibility for what they do. So that makes us all responsible after we reach the age of six or seven.

I keep reading and re-reading that last statement. And I am still rendered utterly speechless.

Finally, the good Monsignor sees the silver lining in the whole affair - taking what little comfort he can:

It just seems like an awful lot of money to me for what happened to them. I don't think it's even possible for the diocese to pay out all that money. You know people who win the lottery usually end up bankrupt. Whether the money comes from a court judgment or a lottery,

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they still have to know how to use the money and not be swindled out of it and so forth.

I think it takes a special, special kind of pathology for a man - found complicit in the molestation of children and ordered to pay millions in damages - to believe that he still has the authority to lecture on the virtues of good financial management.

(The quotes are taken from Garry Wills' excellent book *Papal Sins*).

For an honest insider's view of the clerical culture, see this [article](#).

To be against pedophilia is obvious and banal. That the church has maintained a conspiracy of silence for institutional reasons is shameful, but also not surprising. What is "shocking" is the infinite ego, the unblemished hubris, the unqualified self-absorption of a group of men who - having attended seminary school for a few years - now consider themselves masters of the universe. And perhaps this is a good a reason as any for the abolition of celibacy - not only that it's unnatural and creepy - but so that these men should have one less reason to be so confident in their uber-specialness.

POSTED BY WILDTYPE AT 9:47 PM

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