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Posted: Sun., May 14, 2006, 6:00am PT

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Hand Of God

(Documentary)

A Zingerplatz Pictures, Nobody's Business production. Produced by Joe Cultrera, Hugh Walsh, Laura Corwin. Executive producer, Cultrera. Directed by Joe Cultrera.

By [DENNIS HARVEY](#)

Like last year's "Twist of Fate," Joe Cultrera's "Hand of God" follows an individual -- the filmmaker's brother -- coming to terms with and seeking justice for sexual abuse suffered from a priest decades earlier. Where "Twist" had verite immediacy and punishing emotional impact, "Hand" is cerebral, even experimental in approach. Yet it's finally just as forceful, especially as an indictment of the Catholic Church covering up for its own. Pic well deserves consideration by fests, small distribs and adventuresome broadcasters.

Home movies help flesh out 53-year-old Paul Cultrera's narration of what he'd kept secret for 30 years. As a mid-'60s Salem, Mass., teenager, he'd been an altar boy flattered by attention from the "cool" new priest, Father Joseph Birmingham -- a friendship the boy's deeply religious parents heartily approved. Little did anyone suspect that the priest soon coerced Paul into a sexual relationship. Rebellion, depression and rootlessness marked Paul's adulthood, until a female friend coaxed him into confiding what had happened. As the entire family experiences subsequent shock and disillusionment, it emerges the Boston Archdiocese kept promoting Birmingham (now deceased) over the years despite numerous serial-abuse reports. Potent feature uses impressionistic visual tactics to evocative effect.

Camera (color, DV), Hugh Walsh; editors, Cultrera, Laura Corwin. Reviewed at Cinequest, San Jose, Calif., March 12, 2006. Running time: 96 MIN.
 With: Paul Cultrera, Joe Cultrera, Father John B. McCormack, Bishop Richard Lennon, Josephina Cultrera, Maria Cultrera.

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