

Theology in the Vineyard

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"You're a sad little man." January 30, 2007

Posted by tschmidt in [Church & Culture](#). [trackback](#)

It was nice to see the National Catholic Reporter (Jan. 26, 2007) flag as one of its memorable quotes, the stunningly obtuse and utterly pompous remark of Bishop Robert Lennon of Boston.

"You're a sad little man."

Lennon, then an auxiliary bishop in Boston, was trying to stop Joe Cultrera from filming exterior shots of the archdiocese's chancery. Cultrera was making a documentary, "Hand of God," about his brother Paul's sexual abuse by a Boston priest, Joe Birmingham, a serial pedophile, shuffled five times by the archdiocese. The arresting film was shown on PBS in late January.

I couldn't believe my ears when I heard this chancery hack utter the words to Cultrera who was basically minding his own business filming these background shots. Lennon walks out and asks Cultrera what he was doing there and he patiently tells him that he is completing a film on his brother who was abused by Fr. Birmingham who died in 1981.

Lennon is not interested. He has no time for Joe Cultrera's patient and sensitive rendering of his reason for being there. Joe has no idea who Lennon is. The cleric then turns on Cultrera and says to him if you're trying to make me feel guilty, you're wasting your time...and then the stunningly cruel remark, "You're a sad little man." By itself, the remark tells you just about everything you need to know, certainly about the rot that was exposed in the Boston archdiocese.

I was honestly expecting the film maker to deck the insufferable Lennon. His brother's life had been in free fall for 30 years, incredible pain, a grad from Boston College who had never really lived up to his potential. Joe wisely takes the high road and leaves. The brothers however did get it together to add another sordid chapter to the dying days of the feudal church. You can watch Joe Cultrera's film by going to PBS.

Paul comes alive in the film and skillfully navigates his personal trail of tears to find the equally guilty culprit behind Birmingham, his fellow classmate (1960) from the Boston seminary, John McCormack. He proves how McCormack lied to him about his relationship with Birmingham, that the former had actively colluded to protect the wolf among the several innocent lambs whom he betrayed.

McCormack amazingly is now a bishop (Manchester, N.H) who refuses to resign. So much for accountability, honesty and transparency. And these guys are hunting down politicians who are "gay friendly."

The best part of the film is when McCormack meets with several of the abused. And Paul says this to him:

"So I need to know how you, John McCormack, could believe that lying to me about what you knew of Birmingham's career-long pedophilia could benefit me, and help me to "put it all behind me". You clearly had a chance to assist me in my healing process by letting me know that I was not alone. Instead of choosing to relate to me with Christian compassion, you chose to deal with me as an adversary, closing ranks around the archdiocese's desire to avoid scandal and all the attendant liability. Your pseudo-friendly advice to not prosecute the church was self-serving, as was the advice to "put it behind me". You had to know that putting something like this behind me would only be made more difficult by virtue of your duplicity. And that the anger I would eventually feel for your lies would burn for years. You were playing the priests' old trump card, attempting to keep me in the passive, submissive role of the sheep in the flock, disguising yourself as the caring shepherd. And you were good at it.

I walked out of your office in 1994 actually thinking for a while that you wanted to help me, and that your advice to not prosecute was in my best interest. This is why you need to step down now: because you're so good at using your priest's persona to protect the truth about yourself and the others that you collaborated with - because you and your colleagues are more interested in perpetuating your careers, your power and your images of piety than you are in doing the work of Christ you profess to be interested in. "

Careerism hardly makes for ardent disciples of the crucified kingdom peddler. It simply produces sad little men.

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