

Deliver Us from Evil: Whose is the “most grievous fault”?

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Deliver Us from Evil, written and directed by Amy Berg

Sexual abuse of children and teenagers by Roman Catholic priests emerged as a major national scandal in 2002, primarily due to the trial of defrocked priest John Geoghan in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Since then, new accusations about past and recent abuses have surfaced on a regular and appalling basis.

Filmmaker Amy Berg, as a reporter for CBS and later CNN, spent four years investigating pedophile priests. In the course of her work, she became acquainted with Cardinal Roger Mahony of the Los Angeles Archdiocese, who is alleged to have allowed more than 550 clerics under his jurisdiction to sexually abuse minors.

While a bishop in Stockton, California, Mahony directly supervised Father Oliver O’Grady from 1980 to 1985. Berg’s documentary, *Deliver Us from Evil*, examines O’Grady’s 20-year career as a priest in northern California, during which time he molested hundreds of boys and girls of all ages, including a nine-month-old infant. O’Grady would often gain access to his victims by seducing a parent. The response of Mahony and the Catholic officialdom was to move O’Grady from one parish to another as accusations arose.

O’Grady was obviously a deeply disturbed individual, in need of psychiatric treatment and being separated from society. The cold-blooded, calculated activities of his superiors were even more reprehensible. According to Berg’s film, the Church knew as of 1973 that the priest was raping and sodomizing children. Further, Church officials were aware prior to his ordination that O’Grady was a pedophile.

In an interview with *altweeklies.com*, Berg revealed that there were between 600 and 800 claims against the Catholic Church in Los Angeles under Mahony—an astonishing number given the fact that an estimated three quarters of the victims of abuse fail to report it.

“The way I understand what’s happening in Los Angeles,” said Berg, “is that the Deputy District Attorney Bill Hogman has been trying to get the documents delineating what the Cardinal [Mahony] knew about the reassignments of priests who were accused of molesting children.” She explained that the Church had been fighting the process for four years until the US Supreme Court demanded in May that the institution turn over the documents.

Deliver Us from Evil maps out the manner in which the Church hierarchy abetted O’Grady’s relentless cycle of abuse. Videotaped footage features the deposition of Mahony in a civil case in which two Stockton brothers, who were involved in a criminal case against O’Grady, also brought suit against the local diocese. In his non-credible testimony, Mahony denies knowing that O’Grady was a pedophile. The Cardinal is also shown in a 2004 deposition related to civil cases in Los Angeles stating that a priest’s expressing sexual urges for a nine-year-old would not be grounds for relieving him of his duties.

Mahony embodies what the film’s production notes call “the Church’s Mafia-like practices of perjury, obfuscation and denial.” “Under Mahony’s direction,” says the filmmaker, “the Los Angeles Archdiocese spends \$2 million *a month* paying high-priced attorneys to prevent the release of incriminating evidence. These are millions of dollars being spent for their protection, rather than the victims’ welfare.”

The documentary contains salient interviews with psychologists, former priests and lawyers representing victims in civil suits.

One of the film’s experts is canon law priest Thomas Doyle, who has been sacked as a Vatican lawyer for criticizing the Church’s handling of child abuse claims. In a BBC program aired in September 2006 (“Sex Crimes and the Vatican”), Doyle accused the Church of knowingly harboring pedophile clergymen. He said: “What you have here is an explicit written policy to cover up cases of child sexual abuse by the clergy and to punish those who would call attention to these crimes by the churchmen.... When abusive priests are discovered, the response has been not to investigate and prosecute but to move them from one place to another. So there’s total disregard for the victims and for the fact that you are going to have a whole new crop of victims in the next place. This is happening all over the world.”

An organization called the Survivor Network for those Abused by Priests (SNAP) introduced Berg to some of O’Grady’s victims who were prepared to go before a camera—among them Ann Marie Jyono. Particularly compelling are the segments in *Deliver Us from Evil* with Bob and Maria Jyono, Ann Marie’s parents.

Mr. Jyono, a Japanese-American Buddhist, met his wife Maria in Ireland and converted to Catholicism. The Jyonos recount how O'Grady became a trusted friend and virtual member of their household. ("He was the closest thing to God that we knew.") It took Ann Marie 25 years before she told her parents that the priest had been raping her since she was five years old. Bob Jyono, who has not set foot inside a church since the revelation, loses composure as he describes how his daughter's confession destroyed the family.

Equally horrifying is the story told by Adam, whose mother was seduced by O'Grady as a means of approaching the boy and his brother. Describing herself as the unwitting "gatekeeper," Adam's mother remains a tragic figure.

O'Grady, having served half of a 14-year prison sentence, is now living in his native Ireland after being deported from the US in 2000. (The Jyonos' lawyer found him residing with a family.) He comes across in the film as a sociopath, emotionally dissociated from his victims and the trail of tears he has left behind him in his decades as a predator. Pitifully, he claims to be a victim of clerical molestation himself, as well as incestuous abuse. Although defrocked, he talks smugly about receiving a pension from the Church when he turns 65, which the film suggests is hush money for not testifying against Cardinal Mahony.

Asked why the Church is inundated with so many pedophiles, Berg opines in the film's production notes that the priesthood "tends to attract poor, disenfranchised children, many of whom are abuse victims themselves." Psychologist Mary Gail Frawley O'Dea argues in the movie that the young men who enter the seminary at an early age find their normal sexual development arrested by the Church's repressive environment, creating a predisposition for pedophilia. It is therefore not uncommon, she says, for the priest to seek out psychosexual peers, those being children.

In fact, according to the film, some 10 percent of the graduates from Mahony's alma mater (St John's Seminary in Camarillo, California) ordained in the Los Angeles Archdiocese since 1950 (65 of roughly 625) have been accused of molesting children. In two classes, 1966 and 1972, a third of the graduates were later accused of sexual abuse.

Berg claims the Church resorts to anti-homosexual propaganda as a red herring by trying to link pedophilia to homosexuality. The institution openly admits that it did not respond to complaints involving female minors, even as young as five years old, citing the priests' "normal sexual curiosity."

Further indicting the Church's upper echelons, the film ends by referring to the role of Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, now Pope Benedict XVI, in ensuring that the Church's investigation into child sexual abuse claims were kept secret. As prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, the successor body to the Inquisition, Ratzinger issued an order that was sent confidentially to every Catholic bishop in May 2001. The order asserted the Church's right to hold its inquiries behind closed

doors and keep the evidence secret for up to 10 years after the victims reached adulthood.

"Cases of this kind are subject to the pontifical secret," Ratzinger's letter concluded. Breaching the "pontifical secret" at any time during the 10-year period, threatened Ratzinger, carried penalties, including excommunication.

Deliver Us from Evil underscores the deeply reactionary character of the Catholic Church as a social institution and its mega-wealthy officialdom, hypocritically preaching against sin and vice and forcing its believers to confess "that I have sinned exceedingly, in thought, word and deed: through my fault, through my fault, through my most grievous fault." Clearly, Church officials and priests like O'Grady, as "God's representatives on earth," feel empowered to abuse their inferior flock. After all, they are part of a feudal structure presided over by an infallible pope, a dictatorial quasi-deity.

As the film points out, the Church denounces clerical sexual misconduct, first of all, as a breach of the "sacred" vow of celibacy, rather than a violation of human beings' rights. Celibacy, as Berg's film informs us, has quite unsacred and practical origins in the question of Church land and property. It was introduced as early as the fourth century, to prevent clerics from passing on property to their heirs.

Some 100,000 victims of sexual abuse by priests have already come forward in the US confronting the Church with a plethora of lawsuits. In Los Angeles County alone, there are more than 500 civil suits, some of which name Cardinal Mahony, as well as several ongoing criminal investigations and prosecutions against priests.

Bob Jyono speaks quietly to the camera: "There is no god. All these rules are made up by man."



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