

DELIVER US FROM EVIL

*A Lionsgate Presentation in association with Disarming Films
Written and Directed by Amy Berg*

A film review by Franco P. Visser

For something more serious and disturbing this time I have chosen a film about Oliver O'Grady, a Roman Catholic parish Priest who molested, raped and sodomised scores of children in California over several decades. 'Father Ollie', as he was lovingly referred to by his various parish members, was never formally sanctioned or disciplined by the church managers, instead he was moved from parish to parish as the 'heat' became intolerable for him and his superiors.

The film follows various victims' and family members' stories, at times heart wrenching memories and testimonies – the emotional pain and torture still very evident in those included in the making of this unique documentary. No top notch actors playing roles here. No million dollar sets or fancy costumes. The film includes dialogue from Father O'Grady that is more in the line of a defensive monologue than anything else. Father O'Grady tries very hard to portray himself as insightful, intellectual and repentant, but sadly I am not sure to what extent he can be believed. Father O'Grady's views and experiences of his paedophilic tendencies are regularly interrupted and juxtaposed with the stories of various victims; some well into adulthood now albeit they were children when they experienced Father O'Grady's degrading compulsion.

It should be noted from the onset that at no stage during this documentary film did I get the sense that Oliver O'Grady was truly sorry and repentant for his actions. It seems that he has been forced to say certain things and act in a certain way because of societal pressures and demands. His recall of events, his reflection of his own feelings and actions left me with no doubt that if one were to place him in a position where 'access' to children were easy, he would offend again. Ofcourse this raises a very important question as to the etiology of paedophilia and other compulsive, especially sexually compulsive disorders. And, is this form of disorder really 'curable' or should we only strive towards control and maintenance of such individuals?

There are many theories and explanations for this form of sexual dysfunction postulated by the human sciences. Biology, genetics, nurture, traumatic childhood experiences, misguided adult affection, self-image and rejection issues have all been put forth and argued by psychologists, psychiatrists and the like. But for me the fundamental issue pervasive to this form of sexual disorder is the issue of cure and control. For one, paedophilia is one of the most under-diagnosed and underreported 'disorders' in existence today. There is still huge stigma attached for those who go through these horrendous experiences and this causes most to not report their experiences or the perpetrators through which



they experienced the abuse. And we know that if a person feels ashamed and threatened the chance of that person coming forth and speaking out is rather limited. Read any newspaper or other informative media format lately and one will find that the sexual abuse of minors specifically has risen significantly. Keep in mind that there are also very little formalised 'rehabilitation' programmes in existence especially within corrective centres, the one place where perpetrators often land up.

Apart from the vignettes of Father O'Grady thoughts and defences and some of his victims and their family members' emotionally laden testimonies, the film also takes a look at Father O'Grady's superiors and the stance of the

Catholic Church in general thus far with regards to molestation and paedophilia within their ranks. The sense conveyed by the film's focus not only on a perpetrator and his victims, but also on the management and more senior members of the Church leaves one with a feeling that the film's producer also expressly wanted to address the issue of accepting responsibility. In this documentary's case the constant shifting of responsibility and blame by those Church members involved and the lack of accountability shown by what is essentially a multi-billion dollar 'spiritual' corporation, in terms of souls and revenue, is rather evident and discouraging. If one was looking for further material to fan the flames of hate and resentment towards the Catholic Church, then one would look no further, this film provides plenty of that.

His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI has on a recent historical visit to the United States made special reference to the church's sordid history pertaining to sexual abuse perpetrated by its clergy. He expressed that "no words of his can express the pain" that He and the Church is feeling as a result of the sexual abuse suffered by so many minors. In a Homily ceremony in Washington the Pope acknowledged a long-standing problem of the sexual abuse of minors and vowed that the scandalous phenomenon will receive due attention and eradication. This was the first time that the Catholic Church has publically acknowledged a problem about which it was tight-lipped for several decades. The Pope called for "hope, repentance and unity" in the face of what He termed the Church's "deep shame". This acknowledgement by the head of the Catholic Church appears to be the one chance for this phenomenon to be addressed and rehabilitated more positively and more fully at last.

This film is interesting and different, surely not for those who are 'sensitive' about the more hardcore issues in life, but worthwhile for those with an active interest in gaining insight and knowledge about the life-world of others.