



Several years ago my brother Paul suggested I write a book about his experiences with the Boston Catholic Corporation (B.C.C.). In 1964, a Catholic priest (Joseph Birmingham) had sexually abused Paul at St. James School in our hometown of Salem, Massachusetts. After spending thirty years in a dark box of silence, Paul initiated his own investigation, uncovering some startling abuses of body and power. This occurred many years before these deceptions hit the headlines.

I knew my brother's story and the characters involved. I had participated in his investigation and saw how he was treated. Looking around, I felt there was an untold level to the story of clergy abuse - how blind faith believers like us had survived, adapted and navigated the debris. The devil was in the details and those could only truly be portrayed by someone who knew them from reflex.

When Paul asked me about writing that book I realized I was a guy with more visions than words. So I thought about a film - the thing I knew best. It would be a way for my brother to tell his story - the story of people like him and families like ours - as if he was reading the book he wanted me to write. He would be the one giving the sermon and the clergy would be forced to sit quietly and listen. It would not rely on the iconic imagery and organ drones that other films on this subject rely on. It would twist those religious dioramas into unsettling expressions of the internal torrent the Church immersed us in. I would work the quiet spaces.

Late in 2002 I got word from my parents that the B.C.C. had set a date to close the Salem Italian neighborhood church that my family grew up attending and loving. St Mary's was the pride of the neighborhood, built through the donations of generations. It was the center of that community. The Corporation had decided this community was now expendable and worth cashing-in.

The arc of my storyline stood clearly before me. An unbroken line: from abuse of the sons to abuse of the parents. Between those two points were decades of lying, cover-ups and blatant theft. In the wake of all this laid many shattered souls.

*Hand of God* is a film by my brother that I brought to video. It's an interpretative dance. A weird visual mambo trotted around a straightforward narrative of a crooked happening. It is inside out - on the outside a no-nonsense re-telling of occurrences, on the inside a brew of confusions, silences and dreams. While this film probably moves me to the brink of Excommunication, its muck of memory frames - swirling in murky holy water - has become my own Baptism into self-reliance. It is my most essential, spiritual and honest of breaths.

Joe Cultrera  
Director, *Hand of God*