

January 19, 2007 - **No "Hand of God" for you!** posted by Grant Gallicho, dot Commonweal, TEXAS

If you live in the Rio Grande Valley, that is. The local PBS affiliate there decided not to show the Hand of God episode of Frontline on Tuesday night, although it was broadcast on all other PBS stations around the country save one. Instead, KMBH-TV ran last week's episode of Frontline, which focused on the Taliban. Why would they pull the plug on Hand of God, a documentary about clergy sexual abuse that had received national attention and critical praise?

Could it have anything to do with the fact that KMBH-TV is owned by the Diocese of Brownsville? The Brownsville Herald reports:

Gerald Brazier, a member of the church reform group Call to Action RGV, said people who called KMBH about the missing episode on Tuesday were told that the station's general manager, Monsignor Pedro Briseño, wanted to watch "Hand of God" before it aired locally to see if it was appropriate for local viewers.

snip

Viewers who called KMBH on Thursday were told "Hand of God" did not air because PBS did not provide it to the station on time for the regular "Frontline" time slot Tuesday night.

Yet the senior director of prime-time publicity for PBS said that Hand of God was delivered to local stations on January 11 for review, and again at the show's regular time slot on Tuesday night--on time.

It's also interesting, as the Herald story notes, that the KMBH Web site shows a ninety-minute block of time scheduled on January 16. Most Frontline episodes are sixty minutes long, but Hand of God runs for ninety minutes.

So, what's going on here? Did Msgr. Briseno, president and CEO of the company that owns KMBH, decide that the subject of the film was inappropriate for local viewers? Does he think the Catholics in the viewing area are too fragile to safely absorb the unsettling film? Does he believe they're blissfully unaware of the egregious misconduct of many church leaders in their handling of clergy abuse cases? That they're illiterate? Easily misled? Easily confused?
