

Orange Diocese turns to filmmaking to blur pederast past

On DVD: Lights! Camera! Silence!

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About the only positive observation obtained from *Breaking the Silence*, the recent documentary produced by the Diocese of Orange ostensibly to warn kiddies about its priestly sex-abuse problem, is that our Catholic hierarchy doesn't blame the scandal on fags. Or Jews. Or Freemasons. Or Mormons. And definitely not itself. Although the DVD's liner notes state *Breaking the Silence* "has a single goal: to get teenagers to begin talking about sexual abuse," it becomes clear even 30 seconds into the film that any discussions will—nay, must—talk about the Orange diocese's still-fresh molestation scars in only the most abstruse of terms and wholeheartedly ignore the role church leaders played in condoning child rapes in Orange County parishes over the past three decades. And that's just how Orange Bishop Tod D. Brown likes it. The cover-up continues.

Brown commissioned *Breaking the Silence* last year as part of his *Covenant With the Faithful*, the seven theses he infamously nailed to the doors of Holy Family Cathedral in Orange as penance for the crimes of his fellow priests. In particular, the documentary, according to an afterword, fulfills Thesis 2 of the covenant, which promised to implement "our own diocesan policies for the prevention of the abuse of children and young people."

But nowhere in that *Covenant With the Faithful* was there promise of an unlimited budget, and as a result, *Breaking the Silence* screens like a 1950s education short on menstruation. Non-professional actors make up the cast, and it's a hoot to see these people strain to deliver their tightly scripted lines in a supposedly spontaneous environment. The production values are barely better—stationary shots, computer graphics from the era of Pong, a terrible tabla soundtrack. The most cardinal sin, however, is the use of a really bad boom mike by executive producer (and Orange diocese spokesman) Joseph Fenton—voices sound distant or pass the red zone toward distortion too often.

*Breaking the Silence* begins with a Very Special Foreword from Shirl Giacomi, chancellor for the Orange diocese. "This difficult subject needs addressing head-on," she gravely intones into the camera. "Too often, our teenagers and their thoughts and their feelings are overlooked." From here, the film divides into five parts: a painfully awkward "informal" chat by students about sex abuse, a man-on-the-street segment debunking pedophilia myths (did you know, for instance, that most child molesters aren't dirty old men? And that child molesters are very charismatic?), a probation officer describing how child molesters "groom" potential victims, a heartbreaking interview with the mother of an Orange diocese sex-abuse survivor and an explanation of how to report any crimes.

As a public service, *Breaking the Silence* is useful for teaching teenagers how to avoid potential pederasts and report them to authorities. But the problem with *Breaking the Silence* is that Fenton and Brown offer no context whatsoever. You can see the film 20 times and never realize there was a \$100 million settlement between the Orange diocese and 90 victims of its perverted employees who made this video a court-mandated necessity. No names are named—when the mother talks about the priest that ruined her son's life, she only refers to the deviant as "he." No apology by Brown or any of his underlings for the conspiracy and ineptitude that is plunging the Orange diocese closer to debt. Nothing.

While *Breaking the Silence* posits itself as further proof of Brown's transparency in his diocese's sex-abuse scandal, it's ultimately the cinematic version of smog. It's telling that the closest allusion to the Orange diocese sex-abuse scandal occurs when a long-haired boy blurts out, "What really bothers me is when the media only talks about the negative things," to which a girl

quickly replies, “Yeah, it must be horrible for [non-raping priests] to be judged on these few incidents.” Those two lines represent the talking points Brown has pushed upon Orange County’s 1.1 million Catholics as the cause of their problems—and judging by the collective yawn the faithful uttered after the release of more than 10,000 pages of damning personnel files last month, it’s working.

**BREAKING THE SILENCE WAS PRODUCED BY THE DIOCESE OF ORANGE. AVAILABLE FREE ON DVD BY CALLING FATHER JOSEPH FENTON AT (714) 282-3003.**