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Church and the Fourth Estate

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Church and the Fourth Estate

Abstract

This is a film review of *Church and the Fourth Estate* (2020) directed by Brian Knappenburger.

Keywords

Child Abuse, Mormons, Latter Day Saints Church

Author Notes

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Church and the Fourth Estate (2020), dir. Brian Knappenberger

This is a disturbing and tragic true story, told in this documentary short film. A boy is sexually abused by a Mormon/Boy Scout mentor at a Boy Scout camp. It turns out that the mentor is a pedophile. The boy complains to people at the camp but they send him to someone representing the Mormon Church where he is told not to tell anyone, including his parents, about his experience because if his abuse became known, other boys would not be able to enjoy the experiences of the Boy Scout camp. Indeed, if the boy's abuse became public, it would tarnish the reputation of the Church or other organizations.

If this story is not disturbing and tragic enough, there is more. When the boy was not taken seriously, he went to the police and his story finally became public. A journalist at the local newspaper took up the story. And all hell broke loose. People in the community began to attack the newspaper and its journalist. One member of the community took out ads in the newspaper, attacking the newspaper, claiming the stories were filled with lies. The boy was beaten by fellow

students and the journalist was identified as a homosexual. Efforts to suppress the story and cover up the sexual abuse now came from the community, people who would be appalled if their own children were the victims of sexual abuse. Ordinary people attacked the victim while defending those who allowed it to happen and tried to cover it up. A Bishop of the Church investigated the situation and sent the pedophile back to the camp.

Think about how many times we have heard this story before. You would think that if a child was sexually abused, everyone in the community would support the victim and ensure that the perpetrator was brought to justice. And you would think that organizations that discovered that people within their own organization were being abused would make significant changes to ensure that no other abuse would take place again. But, alas, this is not what happens. The victims are attacked and harassed while the perpetrators and those who conspire in a cover up go free or suffer only minor punishment. Disturbing and tragic.

There is one issue in the film that I find interesting. There is a theological idea in many religions that when a sinner confesses to his or her sin, and sincerely expresses remorse, he or she must be forgiven and accepted back into the fold. This is how our religion operates, they say, and it is not the business of those outside the religion (like the government) to interfere in our religious theology. I am a fan of religions having freedom to practice their theologies, but there are any number of problems with this theological idea, and I would ask: How does this theological idea work out in practice? In practice, sinners confess, but not always sincerely. Religious leaders have a bias toward accepting confessions. When a religious leader accepts a confession as true, the sinner is forgiven and considered pure again, making it possible for the sinner to return to the scene of the crime. Disturbing and tragic indeed.