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Twist of Faith

(Docu) An HBO Documentary Films presentation of a Chain Camera production. Produced by Eddie Schmidt. Executive producers, Kirby Dick, Sheila Nevins. Directed by Kirby Dick.

By [DENNIS HARVEY](#)

Oscar-nominated "Twist of Faith" is a powerful and damning look at the long-term impact of sexual abuse, as well as the less-than-exemplary response of Catholic Church officials to allegations of priestly molestation. Focusing on Toledo, Ohio, firefighter Tony Comes' struggle to have his abuser from adolescence publicly admit guilt, downbeat but engrossing docu reps another strong nonfiction feature from helmer Kirby Dick ("Derrida," "Sick," "Chain Camera"). Fest and possible limited theatrical play could precede its eventual airing on HBO.

A suburbanite in his early 30s with a wife and two children, Comes seems the very picture of all-American normalcy. But something has eaten away at him for years: The sex he was coerced into as a teenager by a popular local priest who frequently invited kids -- and sometimes their families -- to a lakeside house for the weekend.

When other adults weren't looking, the teens were allowed to smoke and drink. Passed out or just waking up in the morning, the boys sometimes found themselves being molested by their benefactor. Having trusted this "cool" grownup in other realms (he was considered a very good influence on potential problem kids), they were too confused or intimidated to report the incidents.

Comes told his parents about it in his early 20s, and his wife before their marriage. But he only decided to go public when a wave of similar allegations rocked Catholic communities nationwide in 2002. Informing the local bishop of his experience, he was told that no one else had reported any misconduct by this priest (who left the priesthood in 1987, only to continue working with juveniles at a public school). When it later emerges several other men had come forward with similar accusations -- and that the bishop likely knew about them as early as 1985-- Comes becomes bitter.

Joined by other plaintiffs, Comes files a suit, but the Church seems determined to cover up the incidents and/or delay trial as long as possible. Meanwhile, subject's escalating "depression and

anger" endanger his marriage as well as his mental and physical health, which noticeably deteriorate during film's course. As if this weren't enough, a priest friend of the couple is defrocked after sexual-abuse allegations, and there's the discovery that Tony's own erstwhile molester lives exactly five doors down the street from their newly purchased house.

Strong material is heightened by helmer's decision to let the Comes' videotape themselves in some confessional moments. Their thin-ice marriage is also glimpsed in dual counseling sessions. The ending finds justice far from served, sealing the family's disillusionment with Catholic Church hierarchy.

Well-edited pic's tech aspects are suitably rough-hewn, with occasional musical balm from Faure and other composers.

Camera (color, Sony HD cam), Eddie Schmidt, Tom Hofbauer, Dick; editor, Matthew Clarke; music supervisor, Blake Beyh; sound, Paul Urmson. Reviewed at Sundance Film Festival (competing), Jan. 26, 2005. Running time: 87 MIN.

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