

## Interview for “Necessary Evil” by Aaron Baker Cole

Today, Tyler R. Tichelaar of Reader Views is pleased to have Aaron Baker Cole join him today. Aaron is here to discuss his new book “Necessary Evil” a novel built around the recent sexual abuse crisis among priests in the Roman Catholic Church.

Aaron Baker Cole has spent much of his professional life in the technical sector, supporting private and government programs in the fields of space technology and national security. Mr. Cole lives and writes in southern California.

Tyler: Welcome, Aaron. I’m pleased to have you here today. I don’t believe the topic of the sexual abuse scandal in “Necessary Evil” will be unfamiliar to any of our readers. To begin, I would like to know why, when so much attention has already been given to the matter of sexual abuse within the Catholic Church, that you felt the need to write your book about the matter?

Aaron: As reports of priest-predation of the young began to mount in the local and national media, the topic slowly found a place in my mind alongside another theme that had been on a slow boil for a number of years—my unplotted assassin novel. It wasn’t long before the two items melded seamlessly, and “Necessary Evil” was born.

Tyler: I want to make it clear to our readers that “Necessary Evil” is a novel. It is not about the sexual abuse scandal among priests so much as a novel based upon the abuse. Aaron, would you tell us a little bit about the plot of the novel, and how the sexual abuse scandal is treated in it?

Aaron: The specific topic of sex abuse by Catholic priests is revealed slowly in “NE.” The matter evolves as the main character, Billy Hawkins, is introduced and progresses from a young, thirteen-year old Louisiana lad, to a collegian in search of direction for his life. We all trudge down pretty much the same trail, but Billy’s path is a tad more difficult than most. In his youth, Billy recognizes that his dossier of human qualities is not quite complete. Though possessing a degree of empathy, he finds that in some situations, when convinced that serious corrections are required, he can plan and execute terminal events absent the impeding baggage of conscience.

Billy realizes that without a great deal of control over his actions, his life could lead rapidly into chaos. Two terminal events, the initial one when he is still thirteen, and another in his early college years at Rice University, combine to force Billy to confront two issues: 1) he has acquired enough control over what he has come to consider his special quality, so that he can lead a reasonably normal life; and 2) appearing to be “reasonably normal,” leaves him unfulfilled with regard to major injustices that he still sees around him.

As Billy is evolving, “NE” introduces a background of events of sex abuse by Catholic priests, and a couple of other individuals who will later have major roles in Billy Hawkins’ life.

Tyler: Aaron, I understand the book begins really with the main character, Billy Hawkins, while still a young teenager, murdering his stepfather for being abusive to his mother and getting away with the crime, which he feels is a “necessary evil.” Why did you feel the need to include this event in the plot and how does it affect Billy’s character and his desire to enter the seminary?

Aaron: The elimination of Billy’s stepfather includes rather a lot of detail that went into the act. The detail is there to lend credence to the eventual result of Billy getting away with the murder. This attention to detail is present in all of Billy’s successful elimination events later in life. Without the detail, the reader would be left simply to trust that Billy had attended to things. I’ve read too many so-called thrillers that proceed this way, and I feel that the reader is being short-changed when he is simply asked to believe that somehow all the unaddressed issues were covered.

Back to your question, Tyler, the initial elimination event—you’ll note that I tend often to sidestep the word “murder;” I’ll have to ask my shrink about that—is required to illuminate how Billy uses his incomplete set of human constraints to his advantage. The eventual lesson is not just for the reader, but also for Billy. Billy is served the graphic lesson that unhindered by an overbearing conscience he can bring justice where no justice is on the horizon.

Oh yes, the seminary. Well, the original elimination event—there I go again—has no bearing on Billy’s eventual decision many years later to enter seminary life on the path to becoming a priest. The event is simply to exhibit Billy’s capability for cold, detailed planning and execution. It is necessary for the reader to know that Billy did not just happen on this realization as an adult. He was given evidence of it early in life, learned to control it through adolescence, and was later presented with an unplanned opportunity spontaneously to employ his gift in defense of another individual, who had and would continue to have a special role in his life.

Tyler: Billy sounds like one in a series of fictional American heroes who takes the law into their own hands. How would you define the moral perspective of a person who kills another human being he deems evil without regard for the fact that he is himself breaking the law?

Aaron: Excellent question, and one I attempt to address in the book. Indeed, the story is about vengeance and vigilantism—matters to be avoided lest they lead us into chaos. Still, they remain with us and I find little evidence that they will soon be absent from the world’s daily record.

Billy is not ignorant of the downside of vigilantism, and indeed goes through an internal debate on the matter. How does he reconcile his decision to perform terminal acts in response to priest-pedophilia? He does what we all do—he rationalizes his decision as being an interim phase, one he will pursue for a time and then ... well, a possible future is visible through a fog of uncertainty.

Anyway, it is never Billy’s intention to purge the Catholic Church of its aberrant priests. That’s crazy talk. He views the Church as collaborating in the sex abuse activities by reassigning offending clerics and subordinating the damage done by them to the greater good of the Catholic universe. Billy’s goal is to raise the attention of the princes of the Church and cause them to make suitable adjustment to the vetting process employed in their selection of priest candidates.

Tyler: A reader generally needs to care about the main character to make a story interesting. What about Billy's character makes him attractive?

Aaron: Yes, Billy is at best a necessary evil, and it was, in turn, necessary to infuse him with human qualities that would warm him to the reader.

I don't want to give too much away, but I will say that while Billy is absent a degree of conscience as regards what he views as his personal acts of retribution, he is not without empathy. It is, in fact, what one might perceive to be an overdeveloped degree of empathy that causes him to come to the defense of those he sees as undefended. In Billy Hawkins we find an individual with a defective set of human attributes: an overly developed empathic quality and an undeveloped conscience. It's my hope that the reader will see this as the deadly combination I feel it can be.

Tyler: Aaron, among the people Billy executes are priests who have committed sexual abuses. Obviously, this plot twist has to be considered controversial. What kind of response have you received from readers regarding Billy's actions, and in general the subject matter of sexual abuse within the Catholic Church?

Aaron: Readers thus far have accepted Billy in the context he is presented, an outlaw on the side of the angels, an outlaw whose acts, while unquestionably unethical, may not be so easily dismissed on a moral basis. I sense most readers do not completely embrace Billy's character until the end of the book. A balance must be drawn.

While some priests—Monsignor Richard S. Sniezyk leaps to mind—defend the past actions of sex-offending priests, I have found no readers of "NE" who are not enraged at the Vatican's irresponsible avoidance of the issue. Even today, forced into superficial action, the Vatican has sent representatives to U.S. monasteries to reinforce the old 1961 method of ensuring that practicing homosexuals are not accepted as priest candidates. They ignore two main issues: 1) homosexuals aren't the problem; pedophiles are the problem, and pedophiles have no greater representation among homosexuals than among heterosexuals; and 2) the Church has made no mention of the potentially huge population of pedophiles who passed their unguarded gates into the priesthood and remain active priests. The most logical reason for the Church's ineffective response is clear: responding to a questionnaire regarding one's current or recent homosexual proclivities is much easier—not to mention far less expensive—than a full blown campaign to analyze the world's population of Catholic Priests for the mental disease of pedophilia.

Tyler: The Catholic Church has always been opposed to homosexuality, labeling homosexual acts, if not homosexuality itself, as a sin. However, you make the point that homosexuality is not necessarily the issue, but rather pedophilia. Could you talk a little bit about the difference and why this matter needs to be better understood?

Aaron: I think I've just covered that to the extent that I'm qualified. My sense is that priests practicing their homosexual preferences among one another or with secular adults, may offend the Church's celibacy doctrine, but pedophilia and the betrayal of the young in their charge can not be excused on the part of any priest or other human being.

Tyler: Aaron, may I ask about your own religious background, especially if you're Catholic or not, and how that has made you react to the Catholic Church's sexual abuse scandal?

Aaron: My parents were exposed to a protestant religion in their youth. Although neither of them came away filled with religious fervor, they made two brief attempts to expose me, their only child, to what benefits there might be in organized religion. Over a period of some months when I was 9 or 10 years old, and again when I was in my early teens, we attended church services. We didn't join the congregation as official members, did not take part in other than the weekly service, and soon ceased each experiment.

I must add that in my late teens, it occurred to me that perhaps the experiment had not yet run its course. I decided to make a final attempt to ferret out for myself the benefits that others were finding in going to church. What I found was that I came away each time feeling emptier than the time before. In my defense, I had read the Bible by that time, and even today employ it and related religious historical texts as reference material. Thinking back, it seems that I was mostly put off by a demand that I stop asking questions and just have faith.

Over the intervening years, I have become convinced that having faith in something outside one's self is ill advised, especially if that faith is placed upon the whimsical nature of some spiritual entity who seems to play fast and loose with his creations—for reasons that are passed off as being intentionally beyond our understanding.

In discussion with my friends-of-faith, I find that what most binds them to their selected flavor of religious dogma is fear—fear of death without the hope of some renewed life somewhere in the great beyond. The concept of an irrevocable end to their conscious existence is often enough to place them in such a nervous state that they must end the conversation. I find this to be the major fault with organized religion. It weakens us. It demands that instead of building up our own strengths and capabilities, asking questions and acquiring knowledge to the extent that we can fully depend upon ourselves for the support we need to go through life, we are encouraged to stop at some undefined point and simply have faith. Then, as though this doesn't weaken their followers enough, organized religions of all stripes identify penalties for disobeying religious tenets and often threaten their flock by restricting the final reward of a rapturous existence after death if they stray from a faith-based path defined for them. It's little wonder that the suggestion to stand alone and face a time-limited existence scares the hell out of some folks.

Sorry about the hell thing. That doesn't exist either—except as we may have created it for ourselves.

You also asked how my religious background might have played into my vociferous, negative reaction to sexual abuse of the young by Catholic priests. It's probably clear by now that my own religious background was nearly nonexistent and had no bearing at all upon my inflammatory response to the matter. I doubt that my feelings in this matter are very different than anyone not associated with the Catholic hierarchy. I am incensed at the suggestion of any degree of molestation or sexual abuse of the young. And my fury is increased by orders of magnitude when the perpetrators of such acts are individuals who know they have a responsibility to protect the youngsters in their care. My anger goes off the charts when such perpetrators are minions of an organized religion that serves as the gateway to its adopted deity. And when the hierarchy of such

an organization sees more benefit in sheltering its aberrant servants rather than attending to those abused by them ... well, there's no chart-space left to plot my increasing rage.

Tyler: Thank you, Aaron, for the honest response. Has anyone reacted negatively to your book? As a Catholic myself, I have heard it said the media is anti-Catholic and is just ignoring scandals in other denominations? Have you been accused of just fueling the fire?

Aaron: I haven't yet received a negative reaction to the main theme of the book. I know one devout Catholic who refused to read it. Another individual read it up to a point where I have a scene describing a priest taking sexual advantage of a young man in his charge. Although the scene is subdued and not intended as a titillating graphic element, some people can more easily accept the fact that abuse occurs without dealing with it at a detailed level. I feel that raising the curtain and revealing the unreported aspects of sexual abuse of the young is required to expose the extent to which childhood is stolen and life potentially ended when such events occur.

Tyler: Aaron, for people who are not at all interested in reading about the sexual abuse scandal in the Catholic Church, what about "Necessary Evil" will still make it enjoyable or interesting to read?

Aaron: I think "NE" can be appreciated as a thriller without necessarily invoking the reader's position regarding priest-pedophilia. While we have concentrated on Billy Hawkins during our discussion, I should point out that there are several interesting supporting characters in "NE." Though it may sound surprising, Billy has a soul mate, Jenna Whitman. Jenna has been a friend of Billy's from his childhood in the bayous of Louisiana. There is a unique, mysterious relationship that gives the hint of a future, but not a promise. There is also Billy's clerical support group, consisting primarily of Monsignor Nicholas Montalvo and Brother Miguel Rodriguez. Billy's efforts would be nearly impossible—and at best very risky—without these individuals. A seasoned veteran of the Seattle Police force is also kicked into play when a joint FBI/Police task force is formed to put an end to Billy's evil ways. And various evil players are given the breath of life, and death, as they become targets for Billy's odyssey of presenting an object lesson for the Catholic Church.

Tyler: Are Billy and Jenna in love with each other? If so, what did you do to make it believable that Jenna could love Billy?

Aaron: Another good question. Are Billy and Jenna in love? I would have to speculate that the feelings between Billy and Jenna transcend love. Their relationship goes beyond the conventional concept of love and enters into a region as yet unexplored in the human equation.

Regarding how Jenna could love Billy, I would have to say that she hadn't much choice in the matter. The subconscious bond between them was not of their making. It simply existed, and as an existing fact was accepted. Any other response would have driven them mad.

Tyler: Aaron, in writing thrillers, have any other writers been an influence upon you?

Aaron: I've taken up quite a bit of your time, Tyler, so let me make this answer short. I didn't write "Necessary Evil" with a genre in mind. Everything today seems to require classification, so the book was slotted as a thriller.

That said, I don't believe that any writer of thrillers had an influence on me. However, if you're interested in my favorite thriller novel, that would be, "When Michael Calls," by John Farris. I know it's cliché, but I couldn't put it down, and it raised the hairs on the back of my neck. I think one of the highest tributes to a novel is the difficulty Hollywood has in turning it into a movie that renders anything close to the original intensity of the novel. Such was the case with the sorry, made-for-TV effort of "When Michael Calls."

Tyler: What about television and film? Television is filled with crime and detective shows today?

Aaron: I must confess that I watch too much TV, and am disappointed in most of it. I also see quite a number of movies, but have been disappointed with Hollywood offerings for most of the last fifteen years or so.

It has not been my method to follow the example of any specific novelist or TV or movie screenwriter. I certainly have my favorites, but I would never attempt to follow anyone's style. That's not to say that it hasn't been suggested that I do so, however.

Tyler: What kind of writing are you working on right now?

Aaron: As you know, my novel, "Forms of Madness," was recently published. The story postulates an international conspiracy that may have played a part in the accelerated closure to the US/USSR cold war. Indeed the cold war went on for decades, but the end phase was abrupt. And beyond the threat of President Reagan's star wars fictions and the real possibility of the USSR, a nuclear superpower, bankrupting itself to keep up, we have no solid basis for the roller coaster slide from the USSR's devotion to socialism to its adoption of the totally unfamiliar tenets of democracy. "Forms Of Madness" attempts to bring some closure to the matter.

The novel I'm working on now deals with the potential result of ignoring certain of the world's suffering social groups. I'd like to say more, but I'm only in the early phase of plot development.

Tyler: Both books sound fascinating Aaron. I wish we had more time to discuss them in further detail. I've always wanted to understand better how the USSR fell away from socialism. Unfortunately, our time is almost up, but before we go, Aaron, would you tell our readers where they may find more information about "Necessary Evil" or go to order the book?

Aaron: I have material about NE and something of a blog type posting at Amazon.com. At Amazon, a reader will also find information about my recent book, "Forms of Madness." Most of the available information on me and about my books can also be found at Alibris, and other book vendor Websites. The books can be ordered at any book vendor Websites, or can be ordered through any brick-and-mortar bookstore.

Readers with questions, comments or criticisms are welcome to contact me through my publisher at iUniverse.com.