

A Catholic Abuse Crisis Syllabus

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See online at: <http://dailytheology.org/2018/09/18/a-catholic-abuse-crisis-syllabus>

The version you are reading right now is Version 2, dated October 15, 2018. Thanks to all who sent in additional resources following Version 1, especially Brian Clites; please keep them coming!

In the spirit of the [Ferguson Syllabus](#) and other crowdsourced collections of academic and other resources, this post collects articles, books, primary sources, and teaching suggestions on the clerical sexual abuse crisis within the Catholic Church. It's mostly intended for theologians and historians who intend to address the crisis with their students in a wide variety of classes, from introductory courses in theology up through the graduate level, but like any list of articles and books, it can be used by anyone for the purposes of understanding more deeply the current crisis in the Church.

This list is not, as will be immediately obvious, a complete bibliography on the crisis. It was compiled from suggestions by a number of university-level instructor/scholars, and includes both documents and articles they have assigned to students, and those they have used to educate themselves. It focuses on analysis that falls broadly in the realm of the social sciences (including history), along with journalism and primary source documents. It is intended for frequent revision and expansion; if you have something to contribute please chime in in the comments or email me at abusecrissyllabus@gmail.com. Please send both a link and a short summary of the resource. To reference the syllabus on social media, please use #AbuseCrisisSyllabus.

Primary Sources (by date, earliest first)

[The Boston Globe's Spotlight Investigation \(January 2002 ff\)](#)

- Huge archive of news articles divided into 9 topics (Predator priests, scandal and coverup, victims, financial cost, law and the laity, the church's response, the clergy, investigations/lawsuits, and opinion), interactive features (a map of accused priests in Boston, a database), depositions (by Cardinal Law and others).

[Philadelphia Grand Jury Report \(September 17, 2003\)](#)

- [BishopAccountability's site on the report](#) includes a breakdown and reorganization of its contents along with links to other reports, news articles, and various responses.
- [Archbishop Justin Rigali's letter to the Archdiocese, September 21, 2005](#)
- [Rigali's remarks at press conference, September 21, 2005](#)

[John Jay College of Criminal Justice, "The Nature and Scope of Sexual Abuse of Minors by Catholic Priests and Deacons in the United States 1950-2002" \(the "John Jay Report"\), February 2004](#)

- Commissioned by the USCCB in 2002

[Deposition of Archbishop Rembert Weakland, Milwaukee \(October 24, 2011\)](#)

- Weakland's deposition gives insight into both standard procedures around abuse cases and episcopal mindset/thinking.

[Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Sexual Abuse, Australia \(2012-2017; final report December 2017\)](#)

- Extensive collection of resources including documents, videos, earlier reports and papers, as well as the final report.
- [Here's one news article summarizing a few key points.](#)

[Pennsylvania Diocese Victims Report/Report 1 of the 40th Statewide Investigating Grand Jury \(July 27, 2018\)](#)

- The "Pennsylvania grand jury report" is downloadable from this website, along with a separate PDF that includes official responses by a number of dioceses and individual priests named in the report. Also included is a 5-minute video of survivor interviews.

["Letter of His Holiness Pope Francis to the People of God" \(August 20, 2018\)](#)

[Zita Ballinger Fletcher, "Abuse Victims Say They Felt Hurt by Ordinary Catholics' Lack of Compassion," Catholic News Service \(August 20, 2018\)](#)

Historical Context and Personal Analysis: Books & Dissertations (alphabetical by author)

[Jason Berry, Lead Us Not Into Temptation: Catholic Priests and the Sexual Abuse of Children \(1992\).](#)

- By a journalist and advocate.

[Tricia Bruce, Faithful Revolution: How Voice of the Faithful is Changing the Church \(Oxford University Press, 2011\).](#)

- Publisher says: "In January 2002, reeling from a growing awareness of child sexual abuse within their church, a small group of Catholics gathered after Mass in the basement of a parish in Wellesley, Massachusetts to mourn and react. They began to mobilize around supporting victims of abuse, supporting non-abusive priests, and advocating for structural change in the Catholic Church so that abuse would no longer occur. Voice of the Faithful (VOTF) built a movement by harnessing the faith and fury of a nation of Catholics shocked by reports of abuse and institutional complicity. Tricia Colleen Bruce offers an in-depth look at the development of Voice of the Faithful, showing their struggle to challenge Church leaders and advocate for internal change while being accepted as legitimately Catholic. Guided by the stories of individual participants, Faithful Revolution brings to light the intense identity negotiations that accompany a challenge to one's own religion and offers a meaningful way to learn about Catholic identity, intrainstitutional social movements, and the complexity of institutional structures."

[Frank Bruni and Elinor Burkett, A Gospel of Shame: Children, Sexual Abuse, and the Catholic Church \(Perennial, 2002\).](#)

- Journalistic account; narratives, interviews with victims.

Brian Clites, "Breaking the Silence: The Catholic Sexual Abuse Survivor Movement in Chicago, 1943-2002" (Ph.D. diss, Northwestern University, 2015).

- Book in progress as of 2018.

[Donald Cozzens, Sacred Silence: Denial and Crisis in the Church \(Liturgical Press, 2002\).](#)

- Written by priest, psychologist, and seminary rector
- Publisher says: "Explains how the misplaced loyalties of those in leadership positions created the current crisis. Cozzens clarifies why bishops and church authorities think the way they do and why the ecclesiastical system might be the real villain in the abuse scandal."

[Philip Jenkins, Pedophiles and Priests: Anatomy of a Contemporary Crisis \(Oxford, 2001\).](#)

- Publisher says: "From the first rumblings to today's headlines, Philip Jenkins has written a fascinating, exhaustive, and, above all, even-handed account that not only puts this particular crisis in perspective, but offers an eye-opening look at the way in which an issue takes hold of the popular imagination."

[Mark Jordan, The Silence of Sodom: Homosexuality in Modern Catholicism \(University of Chicago Press, 2000\).](#)

- Publisher says: "The past decade has seen homosexual scandals in the Catholic Church becoming ever more visible, and the Vatican's directives on homosexuality becoming ever more forceful, begging the question Mark Jordan tries to answer here: how can the Catholic Church be at once so homophobic and so homoerotic? His analysis is a keen and readable study of the tangled relationship between male homosexuality and modern Catholicism."

[Mark Jordan, Telling Truths in Church: Scandal, Flesh, and Christian Speech \(Beacon, 2003\).](#)

- Publisher says: "The subtle and passionate meditations that make up Telling Truths in Church are thus both a response to the scandals and an attempt to think beyond them to a more comprehensive understanding of what they might mean—for Catholicism in particular, but more broadly for all the Christian churches. In five chapters, Jordan writes of speaking of secrets about sex and about same-sex love; the telling of truth to and about God; and acknowledging our feelings about God's flesh. He also considers forms for suppressing and for offering truths, and the way language may reveal or hide them."

[Marie Keenan, Child Sexual Abuse and the Catholic Church: Gender, Power, and Organizational Culture \(Oxford University Press, 2013\).](#)

- Keenan is an Irish psychotherapist who has worked with both survivors and perpetrators of clerical sexual abuse.
- Publisher says: "Linking the personal and the institutional, researcher and therapist Marie Keenan locates the problem of child sexual abuse not exclusively in individual pathology, but also within larger systemic factors, such as the very institution of priesthood itself, the Catholic take on sexuality, clerical culture, power relations, governance structures of the Catholic Church, the process of formation for priesthood and religious life, and the

complex manner in which these factors coalesce to create serious institutional risks for boundary violations, including child sexual abuse. Keenan draws on the priests' own words not to excuse their horrific crimes, but to offer the first in-depth account of a tragic, multi-faceted phenomenon."

[Timothy D. Lytton, *Holding Bishops Accountable: How Lawsuits Helped the Catholic Church Confront Clergy Sexual Abuse* \(Harvard, 2008\).](#)

- Argument pretty much in the title!

[James E. Muller and Charles Kenney, *Keep the Faith, Change the Church: The Battle by Catholics for the Soul of Their Faith* \(Rodale Books, 2004\).](#)

- Muller is the founding president of Voice of the Faithful. This book is a personal narrative of VotF's founding and is a great example of a book by a survivor-advocate -- good for self-education and excerpting for undergrads.

[James T. O'Reilly and Margaret S.P. Chalmers, *The Clergy Sex Abuse Crisis and the Legal Responses* \(Oxford University Press, 2014\).](#)

- By two lawyers/canon lawyers.
- Publisher says: "Clear explanation of the Catholic Church abuse scandal in the U.S.; probes how church law protects bishops from accountability; deals directly with "repressed memory" incidents and belated crime reporting; places blame for priests' improper behavior on failings of church accountability processes; considers reforms and best practices to be applied in the light of the scandal"

[Robert Orsi, *History and Presence* \(Harvard University Press, 2016\)](#)

- Chapter 7, "Events of Abundant Evil."

[Thomas G. Plante, *Sin Against the Innocents: Sexual Abuse by Priests and the Role of the Catholic Church* \(Praeger, 2004\).](#)

- By a psychologist

[Anson D. Shupe, *In the Name of All That's Holy: A Theory of Clergy Malfeasance* \(Praeger, 1995\).](#)

- Publisher says: Anson Shupe is a sociologist who has studied extensively the problem of clergy (priests, ministers, rabbis, gurus) who take advantage sexually or financially of members of their churches and groups—from televangelists like Jim Bakker or Robert Tilton to the infamous Father James Porter who sexually molested at least 200 children. Shupe's focus is not on the psychological motives of these miscreants, but rather on the reaction to their actions by the perpetrators themselves, by the organizations, and by the victims.

Historical Context and Personal Analysis: Articles and Blog Posts (by date, earliest first).

[Currently this list mixes academic journal articles and book chapters, magazine/news articles, and analytical blog posts; some links lead to paywalled resources.]

Robert Orsi, "A Crisis About the Theology of Children," *Harvard Divinity School Bulletin* 30, no. 4 (2002).

[Michael C. McCarthy, S.J., "Religious Disillusionment and the Cross: An Augustinian Reflection," *The Heythrop Journal* 48, no. 4 \(July 2007\): 577-92.](#)

- Abstract: " This essay applies recent scholarly insights on disillusionment as a cultural and psychological phenomenon to the problem of religious disillusionment as experienced by US Catholics in the wake of scandals of clergy sexual abuse."

[Forum: Sex Abuse and the Catholic Church, *The Immanent Frame* \(August 2012\)](#)

- Editor [Kathryn Lofton updated her introduction, August 24, 2018](#), with a brief history of how the Forum came about and a short new reflection in light of the release of the PA grand jury report.

[Tom McCarthy, "The Called, the Chosen, and the Tempted: Psychologists, the Church, and the Scandal," *American Catholic Studies* 125, no. 4 \(Winter 2014\): 1-49.](#)

[Brian Conway, "Religious institutions and sexual scandals: A comparative study of Catholicism in Ireland, South Africa, and the United States," *International Journal of Comparative Sociology* \(September 2014\).](#)

- Abstract excerpt: "Drawing on previous literature, I identify three perspectives related to responses to sexual scandal in organized religious institutions: strategic self-presentation, lay activism, and church–media relations. Focusing on the Catholic episcopal conferences in the three settings and relying on an analysis of national-level bishops’ discourses and practices in the 1988–2013 time span, I find that Catholic legitimations predominate, but appeals to Catholic discourses are more frequent in South Africa than in Ireland and the United States; lay mobilization exerts a partial influence on scandal responses even in contexts providing sociopolitical space for activism from below; and external accountability is influenced by media organizations, but differently so, in all three contexts."

[Anthony Petro, "Beyond Accountability: The Queer Archive of Catholic Sexual Abuse," *Radical History Review* \(2015\).](#)

- Abstract excerpt: "This essay takes up [BishopAccountability.org](#) as a queer archive, demonstrating both its effort to liberate victims from the clerical closet and its insistence on the political act of making stories about sex public. Queering this archive also challenges the normative politics of queer history, prompting historians to ask what it would mean to take up the conjunction of these two sites, sexual abuse and Catholicism, as queer—to account not only for sexual practices we value politically but also those we contest."

Robert Orsi, "What is Catholic About the Clergy Sex Abuse Crisis?," in [The Anthropology of Catholicism: A Reader \(University of California Press, 2017\)](#), 282-92.

Michael Boyle, "How Did This Happen?," Sound of Sheer Silence (February 2017), [Part 1](#), [Part 2](#), [Part 3](#), [Part 4](#)

- by a former Catholic seminarian.
- Parts 1, 2, and 3 argue (his words): that the crisis was caused by "a completely closed and insular clerical culture which prioritized its own autonomy from judgment by non-clerical institutions, and which developed a culture of "don't ask, don't tell" with regard to sexual indiscretions formed in light of its own internal struggles around the fact that a majority of its members were closeted gay men, and which was also struggling with shrinking numbers, thus was incentivized toward doing whatever possible to keep priests in the fold and on duty, while lacking robust tools to recognize the true harm and danger of the sexual abuse of children."
- [Part 4](#) focuses on solutions.

[Carolyn M. Warner, "Why It's So Hard To Hold Priests Accountable for Sex Abuse," The Conversation \(August 17, 2018\).](#)

- Warner, a professor of political science at Arizona State University, situates the Church's handling of abuse accusations against the 20th century history of the Code of Canon Law.

["Four Incomplete Ways of Reforming the Church," Daily Theology \(August 18, 2018\)](#)

- four DT editors suggest church reforms to the crisis. For teaching, useful for suggesting the wide variety of diagnoses and remedies made by Catholics.

[William S. Cossen, "The Real Reason the Catholic Church Remains Plagued by Abuse Scandals," The Washington Post \(August 23, 2018\).](#)

- Cossen, a historian of Catholicism focused on the 19th century, looks at some deep roots of clerical vs lay control in the U.S. Catholic Church.

[B. Kevin Brown, "Clericalism, Conversion, and Church Reform," Daily Theology \(August 27, 2018\)](#)

- includes links to several other articles and commentaries naming "clericalism" as a key problem.

[Kathleen Holscher, "Colonialism and the Crisis Inside the Crisis of Catholic Sexual Abuse," Rewire Religion Dispatches \(August 27, 2018\)](#)

- Holscher, associate professor of Religious Studies and American Studies at the University of New Mexico, argues that colonialism affects both which abuse we consider "significant" and the dynamics of abusive communities, noting that dioceses and orders serving largely white communities in the eastern and midwestern United States often sent their "problem" priests to the largely Native and Hispanic mission territories of the west.
- Example of what Holscher is talking about: [Colleen Heild, "Fugitive Priest Returns to ABQ to Face Abuse Charges," Albuquerque Journal, 9/21/18.](#)
- Primary source document detailing career of priest in the Heild article: ["Timeline of Fr. Arthur Perrault."](#)

[Rebecca Bratten Weiss, "Abuse, Clericalism, and the Culture of Obedience," Patheos \(September 10, 2018\)](#)

[Brian Clites, "The Catholic Church's Grim History of Ignoring Priestly Pedophilia--and Silencing Would-Be Whistleblowers," The Conversation, October 9, 2018.](#)

- Very assignable short article on the longer history of the abuse crisis, from one of the primary scholars working in this area.

Movies

Dramatizations/fiction

- Magdalene Sisters (2002)
- Calvary (2014)
- Spotlight (2015)

Documentaries

- Deliver Us From Evil (2006)
- A Matter of Conscience: Confronting Clergy Abuse (2014)
- [The Silence \(Frontline documentary\)](#) (2011)
 - o Publisher says: FRONTLINE reveals a little-known chapter of the Catholic Church sex abuse story: decades of abuse of Native Americans by priests and other church workers in Alaska...examine the legacy of abuse by a number of men who worked for the Catholic Church along Alaska's far west coast in the late 1960s and early 1970s. They would leave behind [a trail](#) of hundreds of claims of abuse, making this one of the hardest hit regions in the country.
 - o Check out the website: 28-minute documentary plus supplementary text, interviews, timeline. Great teaching tool.