

CONTEXTUALIZING THE CATHOLIC SEX ABUSE CRISIS

Fall 2017

Kent L. Brintnall, kbrintna@uncc.edu

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Since at least the mid-1980s, major national press outlets have been reporting on and the Catholic hierarchy has been aware of the problem of sexual abuse by clergy and members of religious orders. In addition to the trauma of the abuse—for those subjected to it as well as their friends, family and co-parishioners—the way that the leadership of the Catholic Church has responded generated shock, rage, and pain as well as severely damaged the cultural authority of the Church.

In this course, we will try to begin to understand these events. To do this, we will be relying on the treasure-trove of documents collected on the BishopAccountability.org website. We will be asking, what is this a case a case *of*, what is the best frame for interpreting it? Should we be thinking about institutional corruption, or the history of not taking sexual abuse seriously, or the history of exaggerating the seriousness of sexual danger, or the scapegoating of homosexuals, or the prejudice against Catholics? What happens when we start thinking about the role of journalists, the legal system, and technology? What do we notice when we start comparing Catholic cases to sexual abuse at the hands of teachers, coaches, or Protestant clergy? What role do gender assumptions play in how we think about perpetrators and victims? What are the assumptions in the language we use—are people who are sexually abused best described as *victims* or as *survivors*, and why *sexual abuse* rather than *rape* as a description of what has happened to them, and was this abuse really a *crisis*, and if it was, for whom? How does the sexual abuse crisis fit into the broader history of the Catholic Church—as a global institution, as a male-dominated institution, as a hierarchical institution, as an erotophobic institution? And how does the sexual abuse crisis fit into broader conversations about religion's place in a purportedly modern, secular world?

To answer any of these questions, of course, requires knowing both the details of specific, isolated events and more general patterns of behavior and conduct. No semester-long course could explore all of these questions adequately and responsibly. No single scholar could master all of the relevant material. For the next several weeks, then, we will work collaboratively to generate good questions so that students can work individually to pursue their own research projects.

SCHEDULE

8.24 Introduction to Course

Discussing essays from “Sex Abuse in the Catholic Church,” *The Immanent Frame*,
<http://blogs.ssrc.org/tif/sex-abuse-in-the-catholic-church/>

*******Document Assignment #1 due Tuesday, August 29 by noon.**

8.31 In-class screening: *Deliver Us from Evil* (2006, Amy Berg)

Other documentaries: *Vows of Silence* (2008, Jason Berry)
Twist of Faith (2004, Kirby Dick)
Mea Maxima Culpa (2012, Alex Gibney)
The Keepers (2017, Ryan White)

*******Document Assignment #2 due Tuesday, September 5 by noon.**

9.7 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” (2004)

John Jay College of Criminal Justice, “The Causes and Context of Sexual Abuse of Minors by Catholics Priests in the United States, 1950-2010,” (2011)

Students will be divided into two groups. Each group will be responsible for reading and reporting back on one report.

*******Document Assignment #3 due Tuesday, September 12 by noon.**

9.14 Guest Lecturer: Mary Gail Frawley O-Dea

Our guest lecturer is the author or editor of the following work:

Perversions of Power: Sexual Abuse in the Catholic Church (2007)
Predatory Priests, Silenced Victims: The Sexual Abuse Crisis and the Catholic Church, co-edited with Virginia Goldner (2007)
Studies in Gender & Sexuality 5, no. 2 (2004), special issue co-edited with Virginia Goldner

*******Document Assignment #4 due Tuesday, September 19 by noon.**

9.21 Developing timeline

Students should read as much from the following sources as possible before this class meeting. In class, we will work as a group to develop a timeline of significant events and list of significant people as well as questions and topics for the remainder of the semester.

Jason Berry, *Lead Us Not into Temptation: Catholic Priests and the Sexual Abuse of Children* (1992)

Frank Bruni and Elinor Burkett, *A Gospel of Shame: Children, Sexual Abuse, and the Catholic Church* (2002/1993)

Boston Globe Staff Writers, *Betrayal: The Crisis in the Catholic Church* (2002)

David France, *Our Fathers: The Secret Life of the Catholic Church in an Age of Scandal* (2004)

Leon J. Podles, *Sacrilege: Sexual Abuse in the Catholic Church* (2008)

Michael D'Antonio, *Moral Sings: Sex, Crime and the Era of Criminal Scandal* (2013)

*******Document Assignment #5 due Tuesday, September 26 by noon.**

9.28 Vatican II

John W. O'Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, Press, 2008), 1-92

Lumen Gentium (1964)

Apostolicam Actuositatem (1965)

*******Document Assignment #6 due Tuesday, October 3 by noon.**

10.5 *We will work together on September 21 to develop topics for these class sessions. I will*
10.12 *circulate a revised list of readings on September 28.*

10.19

10.26

11.2 Guest Lecturer: Ann Gleig

Our guest lecturer is an associate professor of religious studies at the University of Central Florida. She will be discussing her research on sexual abuse in Buddhist contexts.

*******Wednesday, 11.8, 7:00PM – Terry McKiernan public lecture**

Students are strongly encouraged to attend this lecture.

11.9 Guest Lecturer: Terry McKiernan

Our guest lecturer is a co-founder of BishopAccountability.org.

*******Research proposals are due Friday, November 10 by noon.**

11.16 ONE-ON-ONE MEETINGS—No Class Meeting

11.23 THANKSGIVING—No Class Meeting

*******Rough drafts are due Wednesday, November 22 by noon.**

11.30 Student Presentations/Paper Workshop

*******Book Reviews are due Friday, December 1 by noon (Graduate Students).**

12.14 Student Presentations/Paper Workshop

Please note that this class meeting will take place during the final exam period, so we will meet from 2:00-4:30PM.

*******Final papers are due Saturday, December 16 by noon.**

ASSIGNMENTS

Document Essays (Due August 29, September 5, September 12, September 26, October 3)

You must write six analytical reports on documents from the BishopAccountability.org website. For each of these reports, you must provide a citation that will allow me to locate the document and answer the following questions: (1) What kind of document is this, and how is that relevant to its interpretation? (2) Who produced the document and for what audience(s), and how is that relevant to its interpretation? (3) What *claim* can you legitimately make based on this document? (4) What *inference(s)* can you legitimately draw from this document? (5) What *questions* do you have after reading this document, and how might you go about answering them?

For the *first* and *second* essay, you should identify and discuss *one* document. For the *third* and *fourth* essay, you should identify and put into conversation *two* documents. For the *fifth* and *sixth* essay, you should identify and put into conversation *two* documents from BishopAccountability.org as well as an *academic* source relevant to the documents. (For the fifth and sixth essay, you should explain how the academic source helps you make sense of the documents under review, how the documents illuminate or support the academic source, or how the documents challenge or show the limitations of the academic source.)

You may not repeat documents across the six essays. You are strongly encouraged to try and focus your essays, at least by the fifth and sixth, on some single topic or question.

Research Proposal (Due November 10)

You must write a 3-4 page, narrative sketch of the topic and questions that will comprise your final paper topic. You should describe your topic, explain its relevance and importance, and discuss your plan for research. Your research plan should contain a bibliography, which should include both primary documents from the BishopAccountability.org website as well as academic sources. A detailed proposal helps me give you the best guidance I can for your final paper.

One-on-One Meeting

During the week of November 13, all students will meet with the instructor one-on-one to discuss their research proposals and develop a plan for the final paper.

Research Paper

All students must write a 20-25 page paper on a research topic of their choosing related to the Catholic sex abuse crisis. Students must submit a rough draft of this paper on **Wednesday, November 22**, must make a presentation about this paper on **November 30** or **December 14**, and must submit a final version of this paper on **December 16**. The paper should be comparable to a publishable, academic article on the topic under consideration.

Book Review (Due December 1)

Graduate students must submit a 4-6 page review of an academic book related to the Catholic sex abuse crisis. Students may not review any of the books that comprise the timeline resources for September 21. Students should consult relevant academic journals in their field to see what constitutes an appropriate book review. Students must get their book approved by the instructor.