

What is Catholic About the Clergy Sexual Abuse Crisis?"

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Abstract: In this lecture, Robert Orsi, Professor of Religious Studies and History and Grace Craddock Nagle Chair in Catholic Studies at Northwestern University, looks at how the sexual abuse of children and adolescents by priests was specifically Catholic in its origins and dynamics, not the product solely of individual psychopathology. Orsi argues that the clergy sex abuse crisis has to do with Catholic understandings of the nature of the priesthood, for example, with Catholic attitudes towards children, with the web of relationships that make up Catholic parishes, and with the tension between Catholicism and the modern world, among other things. Catholicism was never the sole cause of the abuse, but the abuse was always Catholic. Understanding this also allows us to see that the consequences of the abuse for many (not all) survivors was not only social and psychological, but religious as well.