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CRISIS IN THE CHURCH

FORUM

What exactly should Jesuit colleges and universities do in order to best serve a Church in its time of crisis?

A CALL FOR OUTRAGE

Mark L. Chapman

Outrage! This ought to be the *first* response to the sex scandal that has rocked the Roman Catholic Church in America. Eloquent reflections and philosophical statements devoid of any real sense of outrage should be dismissed as insincere and irrelevant. In fact, there can be no *Christian* response to the priest abuse scandal and subsequent cover-up that does not begin with a prophetic critique of the institutional bureaucracy that facilitated it. When bishops transfer pedophile priests to other assignments instead of informing the police that a *crime* has been committed, the sense of entitlement that characterizes the institutional church is revealed for what it truly is. Whenever Jesus of Nazareth saw oppression and corruption, he exposed it, and so should we!

Perhaps our most important task as educators at Jesuit colleges and universities is to help students think *critically* and *objectively*, hence the central role of theology and philosophy in the core curriculum. If the discipline of theology calls for the systematic reflection of church teaching and practice in light of the gospel, then how can we teach theology and not examine the priest abuse scandal and its implications for faith? Every freshman and sophomore theology course should address the crisis, and upper level courses and senior values seminars should be offered as well.

Likewise, the study of philosophy requires the student to love wisdom and pursue truth; the Catholic bishops who concealed *crimes* did neither. Indeed, the collective denial of the church hierarchy

in America and in Rome will make for a classic study of related themes in philosophy, psychology, and sociology. Students who have been raised to blindly accept authority should be encouraged to raise critical questions in the academic environment. It is our job to help them do this in a manner that ultimately enhances their faith rather than weaken it. For genuine Christian faith is always focused on God as revealed to us in Jesus Christ, not in human beings and their institutional bureaucracies.

As we work to educate and nurture "men and women for others," let us remind students of the human lives that have been devastated and affected by this scandal: the young people who lived with shame and guilt and those who committed suicide; the hard earned money of the faithful given in love to support the work of charity that instead went to victims and lawyers; and the Catholic schools and parishes in poor neighborhoods that went without proper funding because of the hundreds of millions of dollars paid in settlements. Yet the outrage continues when one considers that the recent report done by John Jay College provides numbers but not the names of offending priests. How strange! Might this be because some of the abusive priests are now bishops? How strange that pedophile priests and brutal police officers are often transferred and given psychological counseling, while others who commit *crimes* are sent to prison.

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