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Forum: Crisis in the Church. The Best Defense is More Speech

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we should accurately describe as well as analyze both the grace-filled and the sinful moments in the church's history. By helping our students to acquire the full story of the church, we enable them as educated laity to judge appropriately the gravity and the distinctiveness of the current situation and to discern whether any resources from the past can help in addressing this crisis effectively. We are obliged to teach our students and the wider public that the church, while holy because of Christ's presence in it, is at the same time "always in need of being purified," as the Second Vatican Council confessed (*Lumen Gentium*, #8).

Second, Jesuit higher education should serve the faith. Faculty, especially in psychology, medicine, ethics, and organizational management, should share with bishops and other church leaders their research about the dynamics of trauma and abuse, on the one hand, and the necessity of accountability and transparency in the church's organizational structure, on the other. In particular, Jesuit higher education can serve the faith by critically examining the competing claims of conservatives, who identify homosexuality, and of liberals, who identify celibacy as a significant contributing factor in Catholic clergy sex abuse. We ought to draw on the research skills of our faculty to present church leadership with a fuller understanding of human sexuality and healthy intimacy.

Third, Jesuit higher education should promote justice while serving the faith. We can do this by educating our students not only to expect, but also to demand accountable leadership from our bishops. The current crisis has elicited such deep anger and sharp criticism not only because of the extent of clergy sex abuse, involving at least 4,300 priests and more than 10,000 victims over the past half century, but also because of the pervasiveness of leadership malfeasance on the part of bishops. As the report of the National Review Board for the Protection of Children and Young People reveals, bishops all too often protected guilty priests, responded to victims with aggressive legal tactics, and appeared more concerned about avoiding scandal than serving the needs of victims or protecting children and young people. We have an obligation to challenge our Catholic students, in general, and those preparing to become lay ecclesial ministers, in particular, to promote just and ethical conduct in the future church by taking seriously their share in the priestly, prophetic, and kingly offices of Christ, so well described by the Second Vatican Council.

THE BEST DEFENSE IS MORE SPEECH

Bren Murphy

The Roman Catholic Church has long been a subject of fascination within U.S. public discourse. This attention has sometimes been quite negative, as it was in the late 19th and early 20th centuries when Catholicism was tied to anti-immigrant sentiments. At times it has been quite positive, as it was during the 1940's and 50's when the kindly, wise, virtuous priest epitomized by Bing Crosby's Fr. O'Malley became a stock character in countless Hollywood films.

This attention has been particularly evident within the visual aspects of popular culture such as editorial cartoons, films, television and even greeting cards. One obvious reason for this is that the practice of Roman Catholicism is itself rife with visual symbols: distinctive religious garb, rosaries, the Sign of the Cross, medals and statues. In some cases, these symbols seemed to be used not just to indicate Catholicism but to signify generic religiosity. But my point is that, for better or for worse, Roman Catholicism has been a staple and often prominent topic of U.S. pop culture regardless of whether its signifiers are used correctly or devoutly. From Fr. Guido Sarducci to *Sister Act* to Pope-themed eateries to Sr. Mary Margarita cocktail napkins, emblems of Catholicism free float in the daily life of Americans, whether Catholic or not.

The recent sexual abuse scandal has understandably received a great deal of media attention. Catholics and non-Catholics alike have been inundated with information about the situation. Sometimes this information comes in the form of thoughtful and well-researched news stories. For many people, it has come in the condensed format of headlines, sound bites, jokes, and editorial cartoons. In their 2002 Report on media, the Catholic League, a self-styled watchdog group, cited numerous media artifacts including 34 editorial cartoons that they considered hostile to Catholicism, primarily because they make reference to the sexual abuse scandal.

Their response was to disparage these cartoons as inaccurate and/or anti-Catholic. But such dismissive treatment is neither wise nor practical. Grievous wrong has been done and part of that wrong has stemmed from silence. While some of the media artifacts may be simplistic in their broad assault; using visual cues such as cassocks and mitres that tar *all* clergy rather than the minority responsible,

they nevertheless point to deep concern, anger and confusion that exists regarding this situation and other sexual matters. The most effective response is neither abrupt rejection nor evasion. As defenders of free speech have long advocated, the best response to speech you don't like is *more speech*...vigorous discourse that challenges logic, acknowledges error, accepts certain points while questioning others...discourse that provides context and, perhaps, leads all participants to deeper understanding.

What better site for such discourse than Catholic Jesuit colleges and universities? We have within our communities the intellectual resources to provide accurate information and mature context. Moreover, we have a ready audience in our students, our faculty, our staff and our surrounding neighborhoods. These are people who have heard the jokes and sound bites and read the headlines. These are people who are hungry to engage in thoughtful, honest discourse. Finally, we have a tradition of asking questions, examining multiple viewpoints, and confronting issues. The fact that we do so with an abiding appreciation of our faith tradition as well as intellectual rigor is a unique gift that we are obliged to give not only to our academic community, but also to the Roman Catholic Church and the wider society in which it exists.

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REFORM STRUCTURES, FOCUS ON THE EVIDENCE

Thomas P. Rausch, S. J.

The scandal caused by the sexual abuse of young people by clergy has transfixed the Roman Catholic Church for the last two years (2002-04), and it has raised the issue of structural reform in the Church with a new urgency. While the vast majority of Catholics have remained loyal to their Church, many have a clear sense that something is seriously amiss.

The scandal has indicated dramatically how little input the laity actually has in the decision-making process in the Church, particularly at the local

Church level. And more and more laymen and women are becoming aware that there are no institutional checks and balances that allow them some say about how authority is exercised in the Church, whether at the parish, the diocesan, or the universal level. They have no way to address the problem of an incompetent pastor or an authoritarian bishop, no say over their appointment, no way to bring their own concerns and experience to the decision-making process of the universal Church. There are no structures of accountability. And they are increasingly seeing the present crisis as calling them to adult status in the life of the Church. I would suggest at least two things that Jesuit colleges and universities might do in response.

First, the Church in the years ahead must progress from renewal to the reform of structures that will provide for greater accountability and a system of checks and balances, so that the Church can function, not as a top-down authority structure, but as an interdependent *communio* of pastors and faithful which it truly is. Jesuit institutions need to address concretely this issue, using their scholarship and research. Some have already done this. Boston College has established an on-going program, "The Church in the Twenty-First Century," which will focus on issues arising from the sexual abuse crisis, particularly the relationship between lay men and women and Church authorities through conferences, special lectures, media, and assemblies. Santa Clara University sponsored a conference in May, run by the Bannan Center for Jesuit Education.

Secondly, perhaps the greatest good that might come out of this crisis is a sustained focus on the evil that the sexual abuse of young people is, not just in the Church, but in society in general. For example, the Gallup Organization reported 1.3 million children were sexually assaulted in 1995. The National Child Abuse and Neglect Data Systems found that for the year 2001, approximately 903,000 children were victims of child maltreatment, 10 percent of whom (or 90,000) were sexually abused. According to the U. S. Department of Justice, some 250,000 to 500,000 pedophiles reside in the United States. The Catholic League recently reported that "in New York City alone, at least one child is sexually abused by a school employee every day," and 60 percent of employees accused in the New York City schools were transferred to desk jobs at district offices located inside the schools. Of these, 40 percent are repeat offenders. If the Church has begun to deal with this problem, other institutions have not.

Most instances of abuse take place in families where it remains a hidden but very real problem.