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Yes We Can

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"Helping College Students Make Moral Decisions" is a worthy but largely unfulfilled enterprise. Jesuit institutions of higher education in particular are obligated to promote moral development, as Shelton eloquently argues. As he also points out, however, this mandate is far from adequately fulfilled at most Jesuit colleges and universities. Fr. Shelton's article is therefore a welcome addition to the ongoing "conversation" about Jesuit higher education. Nevertheless, there are four ways that this recipe for facilitating student moral growth could be improved.

The title of Shelton's article suggests a particular focus within the broader domain of moral psychology, i.e., a focus specifically on moral decision making. This is indeed a focal aspect of moral growth (and the one to which I have dedicated my career), but it is only part of the picture. While no consensual taxonomy of moral components exists, a fair representation would include moral cognition (including decision making), moral behavior, moral values, and moral character. Ultimately, our goal must be for our students to behave morally. However, we should desire right behavior for right reason: both behavior and reasoning are part of the moral mix. Deontological ethicists are often satisfied with this two-part recipe, envisioning moral persons who rationally reflect on moral problems and then act on their moral calculations. Virtue ethicists point out that it is character traits that generate right behavior and that our institutions need to be more concerned with the formation of moral character

(cf. Lickona's, 1991, *Educating for Character*).

Finally, given our religious underpinnings, we must acknowledge that there is a content of beliefs deriving from the Judeo-Christian tradition and the more specific Jesuit Catholic tradition that significantly define the moral domain. This may be the most controversial ingredient in the recipe. As Jesuit Catholic institutions, we have a shared mission and value agenda. Clearly this shared agenda is neither consensual nor a panacea; however, it is possible to reach a value consensus. In July of this year, 30 national experts generated the Aspen Declaration on Character Education, including a set of six consensual ethical values that "transcend cultural, religious, and socio-economic differences": Respect, Responsibility, Trust-worthiness, Caring, Justice and Fairness, and Civic Virtue and Citizenship. Among the 30 signatories were myself, Rev. Tom Smolich SJ of Proyecto Pastoral, Mike Carotta of the National Catholic Education Association, and John Green of the Boy Scouts of America. While none of us was signing as representatives of our respective institutions, we all reflect those institutions in our orientations.

If Jesuit institutions of higher education are serious about impacting on the moral growth of their students, then it is important to understand the breadth of moral growth, its many components, and how to impact effectively on each (cf. Berkowitz, 1991). The focus on moral decision making is certainly central to this enterprise, but it is not enough. Shelton does indeed touch upon other ingredients, but only minimally, and fails to integrate them adequately. For example, his third theses purports to focus on life-story

narration, conscience, and values; however, only conscience is actually discussed, and then only in a skimpy fashion (despite Shelton's expertise in this area).

Shelton focuses on a few select influences at great length; primarily Western consumerism and family breakdown. There are two problems with this strategy. First, the lengthy discussion of Western consumerism (1) suggests that attempts to affect college student morality may be futile (a strangely pessimistic beginning to an article on "helping college students make moral decisions"); (2) suggests a largely passive mode of moral formation, something akin to moral osmosis, and (3) implies that moral education is impeded because youth do not have good character. If, however, youth did have good character, the need for moral education would not be very great and this paper would be largely unnecessary. Secondly, both of these rather extended sections are focused on processes external to higher education. Students may come to us with ill-formed morality due to family dynamics and cultural values, but this orientation casts a remedial and impotent character on the enterprise. Shelton seems to suffer the typical clinician malaise of seeing the world through the eyes of his clinical patients. A recipe for moral formation should more fruitfully focus on what our institutions can do. Some excellent models exist for supporting student moral development on Christian campuses; the Christian College Consortium for Teaching Values (a consortium of 13 small Christian colleges) has made remarkable headway in faculty development for enhancing student moral development (e.g., McNeel, 1991). A recent Council of Independent Colleges

conference on "Developing Personal and Public Ethics" attracted nearly 500 representatives of 125 different colleges and universities, many of whom (including the Center for Ethics Studies at Marquette University and the Values Program at LeMoyne College) were there to present their own endeavors in promoting college student moral growth. These endeavors are quite diverse but tend to focus on three central influence sources in higher education: role modeling (as Shelton points out, this should include modeling by both individuals and the institution as a moral agent), didactics, and cognitive challenge (cf., Berkowitz, 1991).

There are four problems with the prescription Fr. Shelton offers at the end of his paper: (1) it seems thoroughly unrelated to the rest of the paper; (2) no support is offered for the specifics of the prescription; (3) most are presented in too sketchy a fashion to be useful; (4) there are some glaring omissions from the ingredients of the prescription, most notable sharing control with students (cf. Power, Higgins and Kohlberg, 1989), treating students as mature adults, structured student peer discussions of ethical issues both in and out of the classroom (cf. Berkowitz, 1985), and teaching about ethics (cf. Ashmore, 1991). These are the things we can do, and indeed are doing.

It is almost inevitable that any mention of Kohlberg's theory be qualified by mention of Carol Gilligan. Shelton, however, is unfair in presenting Gilligan's critique centrally in the text and then relying on a footnote to point out that the evidence does not support Gilligan's position. There is indeed substantial evidence that Kohlberg's scoring system does not misrepresent females'

moral reasoning and gender differences, for the two "voices" of moral reasoning are minimal (cf. Walker, 1991). Kohlberg has even integrated a version of the female voice (beneficence) in his final articulation of his highest stage of moral reasoning (Kohlberg, Boyd & Levine, 1990). Given the audience, it may be worth noting that Kohlberg received both of his honorary degrees from Jesuit institutions (Marquette University and Loyola University of Chicago). Finally, Shelton inaccurately suggests that Kohlberg does not expect life experiences to affect moral development. Kohlberg's initial treatment of what later was called "Stage 4-1/2" (Kohlberg and Kramer, 1969) and his oft-cited anecdotes about life events in the moral development of his longitudinal subjects (e.g., Kohlberg, 1973) serve as strong examples of this claim.

In conclusion, whereas Shelton's project of "helping college students make moral decisions" is a decidedly worthy one, his paper lacks in substantive ways the ingredients necessary to help others attain this objective. A full theory of moral personhood is needed. Clearer integrations among his theses and between the theses and the prescriptions are also needed. A greater focus on what can be done, along with supportive evidence, would be welcome. The task of nurturing the moral growth of our youth is the most critical task facing humanity. As Tom Lickona (1985) has asserted, "a child is the only known substance from which a responsible adult can be made." To that I add that responsible adults are the only known substance from which a moral world can be made. We must do our share, not only because we value the Jesuit mission but simply because we are human beings.

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