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Forum: Crisis in the Church. Questions of Justice

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IT'S NOT A "PERCEIVED CRISIS"

Joe Cirincionne

One-time seminars on the "perceived" crisis in the Catholic Church or conferences on Church responses to the crisis might momentarily relieve student, faculty, community emotions. They might indicate, short-term, that Jesuit colleges and universities care, and these endeavors might even have good PR value. But Jesuit higher education ought to be thinking long-term with the academic tools at its command.

At Rockhurst, we've made much about teaching people how to think, not what to think. Learning how to think, especially about their faith lives, our graduates comprise an enlightened laity, particularly in the Catholic Church — a major accomplishment of Jesuit education across the globe, a major contribution to the Church.

Long-term, this accomplishment will help to eliminate the mind-set that has tolerated despicable acts in the Church — the acts of perpetrators and members of the hierarchy who have ignored the victims and enabled the predators. Without blindly accepting "what to think" about morality, Jesuit-educated laity can make informed moral decisions when confronting immorality in the guise of established authority, whether a priest's or another figure's, or twisted rationalizations of established authority, whether the Church hierarchy's or some other governing body's.

Furthermore, by knowing how to think, Jesuit graduates know the difference between truth and perception and the need to check perceptions against reality. An educated laity will not spin its wheels in postmodern paralysis, wondering whether what it knows to be harmful and predatory may actually be benign just because others perceive it to be. Jesuit-educated laity will be well beyond this relativistic nonsense voiced so often today.

Along these lines, presumably reputable academics (Rind, Bruce, Philip Tronmovitch, and Robert Bauserman. "A Meta-Analytic Examination of Assumed Properties of Child Sexual Abuse Using College Samples." *Psychological Bulletin* 124.1 (1998): 22-53.) have tried to advocate the notion that adult-child sexual relations are not always abusive. They argue that scientists shouldn't indiscriminately use judgmental terms like *child sexual abuse*, *victim*, or *perpetrator*. Rather, they should "focus on

the young person's perception of his or her willingness to participate and his or her reactions to the experience," as if a child's perceptions could change the reality of what had occurred. Our graduates know how to think about pedophilia, and they know that perception doesn't morally justify it, any more than academic or Church authority.

Our graduates know that pedophilia is morally reprehensible. They know that Holy Orders or a Ph.D. in psychology doesn't make it right. They know that hierarchical compassion doesn't make it right either. In fact, they know today that the Church isn't facing a perceived crisis — it's a real one. The fact that Rome may believe that zero tolerance is a bit harsh regarding morally reprehensible actions of the clergy only shows how real this crisis is.

Fortunately, some in the Church hierarchy value an enlightened laity. For instance, Bishop Boland of the Kansas City-St. Joseph Diocese set up a model for reviewing abuse charges against clergy: his review committee comprises lay people only — some non-Catholic — suggesting just how well an educated laity can serve the Church through independent moral decision-making.

Joe Cirincionne is a professor in the English department at Rockhurst University.

QUESTIONS OF JUSTICE

Mary Ann Donnelly

The fundamental mission of a college or university is to search for and disseminate knowledge and truth. This forum addresses a specifically focused restating of the question posed by Father General Hans Kolvenbach, S.J., at Santa Clara University in 2000: "How can the Jesuit colleges and universities in the United States express faith-filled concern for justice in what they are as Christian academies of higher learning, in what their faculty do, and in what their students become?" Questions of justice surely are at the heart of the current "crisis" not only for the victims, but for the members of the church as a whole.

I will discuss two specific points. The first is the contribution Jesuit colleges and university can make to what could be the development of a more just



Collage by Sean Cullen.

process of governance in the church. The past thirty years have served as an experiment in developing shared governance but more importantly shared commitment and responsibility for the mission of our schools as Jesuit and Catholic. This growing association of Jesuit and lay colleagues is as an example to the church of the richness to be garnered through lay involvement.

After the period of separate incorporation, it is my impression that the Jesuits themselves were unsure how to maintain in an effective way the Jesuitness of these institutions which they no longer owned. There was angst and seemingly endless discussions about what it means to be a Jesuit institution. I do not mean to suggest that those conversations are over. This magazine is but one of the ways that the discussion continues.

What I do wish to emphasize is that over time there has come to be a genuine sharing of responsibility for the Jesuitness of the colleges and universities. If you ask Jesuits today many will agree that the participation of lay colleagues is not only essential to the mission but a great source of enrichment as well as assurance that the mission will continue. This perspective was palpable at Santa Clara in 2000 in ways

that were not present at Assembly 89, which had at best a token lay representation. At Santa Clara, Jesuits, observing the thoughts and enthusiasm of their lay colleagues, commented that the colleges were in good hands. This experience in the growth of understanding of the abilities and commitment of lay colleagues to this shared mission can be recommended to a church that is clearly fearful of letting go, of letting there be significant lay involvement in the governance structures of the church.

The second contribution that our schools can make is to gather information and provide critical research of it to expand ours as well as the church's understanding of its role in society. For example, my college sponsors the Le Moyne College/Zogby International "Contemporary Catholic Trends" survey project. This undertaking is the basis for applied social science research within the context of a Jesuit and Catholic institution which can deal in a critical and credible way with issues facing the church and society.

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