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Forum: Crisis in the Church. Examine the Competing Claims

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TAPPING BOSTON'S TALENT

Jim Keenan

Ethical judgment ends in action as Aristotle tells us. To speak of Jesuit Higher Education's response to the crisis, therefore, I turn to university wide actions that embody, I think, Jesuit educational values.

Living in Boston, inevitably, we live within the crisis. One of its salutary effects has been Voice of the Faithful, which has been well supported by both Weston Jesuit and Boston College faculty, administration, staff, students and alumni. It is hard to imagine VOTF's growth without the support of these two institutions. In turn, these two institutions are certainly indebted to VOTF's leadership, vision and resilience.

Another worthy effect of the crisis is the initiative, The Church in the 21st Century (www.bc.edu/church21) which Boston College president, the Reverend William P. Leahy, S.J., launched two years ago to promote "a forum and resources to assist the Catholic community in transforming the current situation into an opportunity for renewal." Literally, dozens of major events have been provided in each of the program's two years. After its first year of looking back at the crisis, this second year projects possibilities for renewal.

Because we have become so familiar with responding to events around us and because we have in place the initiative, we are accustomed to engaging from multitudinous perspectives a considerable array of topics. For instance, a look at our calendar for only one week in March lists: March 15th, a panel on "The Report on the Crisis in the Catholic Church in the United States" by The National Review Board for the Protection of Children and Young People; March 16th and 23rd, a two day workshop exploring collaborative leadership in parish life hosted by the Institute of Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry; March 16th, the Gasson Lecture, "The Rights of Priests"; March 18th, "The Future of Catholic Schools: Survival and Models for Transformation," hosted by the dean of the School of Education with members of the USCCB and NCEA among presenters; March 22nd, "A Seminar on Celibacy" with John O'Malley, Margaret Farley and Columba Stewart speakers.

In the work of the initiative, the theology department is clearly involved. But so are the departments of history, philosophy, psychology, political science, and sociology. Similarly, besides the administration, other regular hosts, coordinators,

program directors, and participants include members from the Boisi Center for Religion and American Public Life, the Institute of Religious Education, the Law School, the School of Nursing, and the School of Education. In a word, it's hard to think of how we can become more involved. (You should see course offerings!)

In the initiative, interdepartmental cooperation has become the norm. In February, for instance, eight of us, having worked over a year in planning, hosted a two day conference of forty participants: Toward an Ecclesial Professional Ethics (www.bc.edu/church21/programs/ethics). Examining the ethical training of lay, priestly and episcopal leadership, we included not only historians, theologians, sociologists, journalists, and ethicists, but also those in organizational management as well. These specialists provided their insights regarding professional ethical training in corporate structures. Episcopal, clerical, and lay leaders, like Archbishop John Quinn, Frank Butler of FADICA, *Commonweal's* editor Paul Baumann, and VOTF President James Post (also a professor of management) were invited to respond to them. It was a conversation of people of diverse but complementary competencies embodying, as Ignatius urges us to be, a contemporary university thinking with and for the Church.

James F. Keenan, S.J., a moral theology professor at Weston College, holds the Gasson Chair at Boston College.

EXAMINE THE COMPETING CLAIMS

William Madges

Jesuit colleges and universities, in the words of the the 34th General Congregation of the Society of Jesus (1995), are called — as *universities* — to be places of "serene and open search for and discussion of the truth." As *Jesuit* institutions of higher learning, they are required to "act in harmony with the demands of the service of faith and promotion of justice." In light of this mission, how should Jesuit higher education respond to the current church crisis? Our response requires attention to the past, the present, and the future.

First, Jesuit higher education should speak the truth. In appropriate courses in theology and history,

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.

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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,