

10-1-2004

Forum: Crisis in the Church. A Double Crisis of Faith and Leadership

Diana L. Hayes

Follow this and additional works at: <http://epublications.marquette.edu/conversations>

Recommended Citation

Hayes, Diana L. (2004) "Forum: Crisis in the Church. A Double Crisis of Faith and Leadership," *Conversations on Jesuit Higher Education*: Vol. 26, Article 16.

Available at: <http://epublications.marquette.edu/conversations/vol26/iss1/16>

According to Dr. Gary A. Rattray, (*The Greener Pasture*) (May 14, 2002), "about 85 percent of the offenders [of child sexual abuse] are family members, babysitters, neighbors, family friends or relatives." This is a problem that needs to be addressed.

Thomas P. Rausch, S.J. is T. Marie Chilton professor of Catholic theology at Loyola Marymount University.

A DOUBLE CRISIS OF FAITH AND LEADERSHIP

Diana L. Hayes

The Catholic Church in the US and around the world is today struggling with a crisis that strikes to the very heart of what we, as the People of God think not only of our Church but also of our Christian faith itself. The crisis caused by the unfolding and deepening of the sexual abuse scandal among priests and religious has in part been made even more difficult because of the seeming inability of our leaders, bishops and others, to confront openly and honestly the impact that this scandal has had and continues to have on the Church and the faithful. We are thus confronted not only by a crisis of faith but also by a crisis of leadership.

Although the impact spreads throughout the Church, those especially affected are young Catholics, those found in our many Catholic colleges and universities, who are still struggling to shape and strengthen their faith in the face of countless shocks from the increasingly secular world. Having to deal with further shocks from within the Church itself leaves many of them teetering on the edge of an abyss. What can and should we who teach and serve in administrative roles at Jesuit colleges and universities do to help them bridge this abyss with a strong and unfaltering faith that leads them over the abyss into the arms of Jesus rather than a shaky and unformed faith that allows them to fall?

In keeping with their mission as institutions of higher learning, Jesuit colleges and universities must ensure that their students are not only introduced to the rich tradition of social justice teachings that have historically placed the Roman Catholic Church in the forefront as a critical voice over against the growing secularization of society with its accompanying hedo-

istic worship of self and materialism. A Jesuit institution should also provide opportunities outside of the classroom for students to discuss issues that challenge their faith in God and their Church and its leadership. It should also enable them to see this tradition in action lived in the world. This means participating in programs and projects that acknowledge the harm that has been done but also work to change the circumstances under which they occurred.

What should be done? Opportunities are needed and safe spaces provided for serious and critical dialogue between students, faculty and administrations. Painful they may be, but is this not part of the process by which we seek to develop our students as critical thinkers and contributors to both Church and world? It is of critical importance that we meet with these students, individually if necessary, but more importantly in larger forums that enable them not simply to hear the truth about what has happened and how it was allowed for too long to happen but are also able to ask questions and receive clear and honest answers from which they can draw courage and hope.

Martyred Jesuit scholar Ignacio Ellacuria affirmed that the task of a Catholic university is to engage with rather than withdraw or hide from the world. It has a responsibility to mold future leaders, both of Church and society, in an atmosphere of open yet critical enquiry. This is especially critical today as the People of God who are truly the Church seek to walk their journey with the Christ, not blind-folded and handcuffed by regulations and restrictions that leave them mute, blind and restrained but with the awareness that we are all responsible for ensuring the vitality of the Church and the faithful.

Diana L. Hayes is associate professor of theology at Georgetown University.

