To the Editors:

“For those who love God, all things work together unto good.” Rom. 8:28

I teach a course entitled “Introduction to the Old Testament.” During its 13 week semester it traces the history of the people of Israel who produced the texts now revered as normative by both Jews and Christians. On Monday Sept. 10, we were dealing with the event of Exodus, a major theological theme of the Old Testament whose written record can be traced to the period of Israel’s monarchy. Then came Sept. 11. On Sept. 12 I interrupted the flow of history to move ahead to the period of Israel’s defeat as a nation as it is recorded in the book of Lamentations. It was a time to grieve, not yet to analyze or even, primarily, to seek rational explanations for the demise of one proud nation. The one proud Jerusalem is depicted metaphorically as a widow bereft of all her sons. Those who remained were hungry, starving even; they had been brought low, humiliated beyond what would have been considered thinkable. The once beautiful city and its temple had been burned by Babylonian conquerors.

The five chapters of Lamentations are true to the books of Lamentations throughout; they sympathize much less to self-blame and guilt than to an almost incomprehensible pain. That is why the Church prays this book on Holy Saturday, to allow Christians to voice the pain of the death of the sinless one; the Church has, liturgically, buried Jesus who died for our sins. Though his resurrection is sure, it is not yet. Holy Saturday is the time between - between Good Friday and Easter.

On Sept. 11, the emotions of shock and grief took precedence over rage and blame. New Yorkers, Americans, loving people everywhere were seeking desperately, no matter what their politics, to absorb what had happened and its gravity. Later there would be efforts to make sense of it all and to decide how to respond. And yet, despite the still present carnage and conflict about why it happened and how to respond appropriately, few would contest that good comes from the tragedy and that even more good is possible. To be sure, the World Trade Center tragedy is not itself a good, but a resurrection of sorts has emerged from its ashes.

This semester I am not teaching, but if I were, I would again teach the book of Lamentations out of its historical context. The Boston Globe has inundated our consciousness with stories about how the Archdiocese of Boston and Cardinal Law were involved over decades in the cover-up of the sexual assault of children by priests. The tragedy has been depicted as one of enormous proportion, and I agree that it is. The “Spotlight Team” has uncovered the breadth of the problem in one diocese (more than 70 priests) and the breadth of the cover-up (the out of court settlements, the confidentiality requirements, and their toll on the accusers and even on at least one of the accused). Several persons and columns have asked the Cardinal to resign.

Just as Israel could not reverse the behaviors of earlier generations, we also cannot reverse or change its theological commitments. The defeated Israel and the fall of Jerusalem: just as we cannot undo the World Trade Center disaster that created so many widows and widowers and so many children without parents, we cannot undo the harm that has come to the Church— to the assaulted and their families, and to the very many faithful priests who will always now be subject to suspicion by some. We cannot prevent the erosion of trust and good will that has already taken place. It is a time to grieve.

But another voice from the period that followed Israel’s defeat is found in chapters 40-66 of the book of Isaiah, a voice that promises a new beginning for the defeated nation. Good can come out of evil—not immediately perhaps but in time. Can we learn from the failures of the past so that we do not repeat them in the future? And what is it that we might learn? I would suggest the following for starters:

1. Ineffability is very limited. The Church is not perfect nor is its leadership. This allows us both to forgive—it is Cardinal Law or pedophiles—as well as to prosecute. Whether the wrongdoing is bad judgment or bad action, we as the Church should not allow the cover-up of wrongdoing—our own or other people’s—when the consequences of such wrongdoing extend to the community.

2. One should consult broadly and wisely and not unreservedly follow the advice of one’s lawyers. Because our culture presses for perfection, it assumes the legitimacy of widespread malpractice litigation. This culture encourages victims to plead not guilty.” In such a culture, it takes moral courage to admit up front that one has been guilty of wrongdoing, whether that is an error in judgment or in action. This is a message the Church should always offer to the world—even if it means taking monetary or credibility risks to do so.

3. Priests are not the only persons who commit sexual assault. Parents, step-parents, -so-called friends as well as day-care providers and strangers may be guilty. In those instances also, it is very difficult for children to speak about what has happened. Who can they tell? Who will believe them? From this tragedy we might learn to encourage children to speak up and then give the child, rather than the community’s respected adult, the benefit of the doubt.

To the Editors:

We would like to take this opportunity to discuss an article that appeared in the Crusader on Mar. 1, 2002. In the article “The Wiz: a soulful play at soul-less school!”, the Telegram and Gazette is cited as saying that there were a number of African American alumni who felt “Their version was completely true. The point of the production was to have fun. Everybody was accepted into the cast. The Boston Globe was never contacted by the Boston Globe. The Wiz Wins”. I would suggest that this was simply a parody of the controversy over The Vagina Monologues. Absolutely nothing to do with the Senior Gift or the show’s efforts to raise money. Only one thing in The Crusader article regarding our production is completely true. The point of the production was carried out: to have fun.

Kimberly Gray ’02 & Robert A. Hymas II ’02 Director and Asst. Director, “The Wiz”