The Identity and Mission of an American Catholic University, in Light of Pope John Paul II's Apostolic Constitution on Catholic Universities, Ex Corde Ecclesiae

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Abstract
Catholic colleges and universities in the United States started experiencing major identity crisis in the late 1960s when people started asking serious questions about the meaning of the Catholic identity of Catholic institutions of higher education. At the time, there were no satisfactory answers to the questions asked. As a result of the crisis, many Catholic colleges and universities lost their Catholic identity. To address the problem and set forth directions for a lasting solution, Pope John Paul II issued the Apostolic Constitution, Ex Corde Ecclesiae. In the document, the Supreme Pontiff defined Catholic identity, enumerated the essential characteristics of Catholic colleges and universities, and outlined the principles and norms that Catholic institutions of higher education are to adopt and follow, to maintain Catholic identity. In compliance with the directive of the Holy Father that episcopal conferences of countries adopt and apply these principles and norms for the Catholic institutions in their countries, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops promulgated The Application of Ex Corde Ecclesiae for the United States on June 1, 2000, after it was approved by the Vatican on May 3, 2000. In the document, the bishops enumerated the principles and norms that Catholic institutions of higher education in the United States are to follow and abide by, to maintain Catholic identity.

The purpose of this study was to ascertain and understand the extent to which American Catholic University is fulfilling and applying the principles and norms in both documents to maintain Catholic identity. To achieve this, the researcher interviewed some members of faculty of the School of Theology of the institution, and consulted some recent documents containing the policies and programs of the institution.

The findings from the research revealed that while the institution had undertaken many initiatives, and incorporated many of the principles and norms into its functions, policies and programs, not all the members of the university community are participating in institutional mission-centered programs and activities. Research participants stated that for the active participation of all the members of the university community to be achieved, it would require more effort on the part of the institution to encourage all the members to...
be actively involved by playing their parts to foster the Catholic identity and mission of the institution. The collaboration of all the members would put the university on the path of maintaining a strong and vibrant Catholic identity.

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