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It is not that Catholic colleges were unconcerned with being Catholic in earlier times; indeed, countless Jesuits, Dominicans, LaSallian Christian Brothers, and religious women too numerous to list, armed with Walter Farrell's *Companion to the Summa*, and then later with John L. McKenzie's biblical theology writings, helped students fulfill their twelve-credit general education requirement in theology. Of course, philosophy (Catholic and scholastic in tone) was a twelve-credit requirement then, too. But those were times when Catholic identity was something with which undergraduates arrived, and everyone else in the college or university assumed that the philosophy and theology departments would complete the task of further education in these areas. The twelve-credit days are, by and large, gone. Students formed in the Catholic tradition have, for the most part, been replaced by undergraduates who lack parochial educations. Thus, the issue of Catholic identity reasserts itself. How is our college or university a Catholic institution amidst such a diverse student body, and how do we assess this identity?

*Ex corde Ecclesiae* has also prompted all of us re-examine our mission statements. Although mission statements, perched as they often are at the front of catalogues, may seem homiletic and innocuous, they are determining statements. They can be seen as optative statements, translated from the Latin subjunctive mood “wished for actions yet to occur,” that call an institution forward. (Newman writes optatively, too.) Accrediting agencies (North Central, Middle States, etc.), on the other hand, see mission statements as promises and commitments to student learning that must be achieved.

The “hunt for Catholic identity” has been a nice way to phrase what has been happening during these past twenty years. Catholic identity is not being invented *de novo*, nor is it being dusted off, as if we had the answer all along but it had been tucked away. It is also not proprietary, as if some of the people in the university (e.g., the religious studies department or the few remaining religious of the sponsoring community) have known our Catholic identity all along and can be counted, they themselves alone, to “do it,” whatever that means. The hunt for Catholic identity has been going forward on a broad scale, both on our campuses—e.g., Msgr. Dick Liddy’s Center for Catholic Studies at Seton Hall University—and off our

campuses—e.g., Fr. Jim Heft’s Institute for Advanced Catholic Studies in Los Angeles. The hunt is also going on in the budgets of our Catholic institutions, especially with regard to the creation and funding of many vice presidencies of mission, executive decision-level positions that are relatively new to the Catholic college scene. Indeed, these remarks on Catholic identity could be aptly concluded in one reviewer’s synthesis of the central thesis of Sister Alice Gallin’s book, *Negotiating Identity*:

Given the changes in church and society beginning in the 1960s, Catholic colleges needed to define themselves as Catholic and as viable academic institutions in view of these changes. The task had to be done, not in isolation, but rather in negotiations with four constituencies: (a) U.S. higher education and its standards, (b) federal and state government and its ‘regs,’ (c) the campus and its faculty, students and trustees, and (d) the Catholic Church and its tradition, expectations, and laws.  

The hunt has begun and is proceeding apace.

Other important tasks have preoccupied Catholic college personnel during these intervening years; these tasks have fallen not so much to faculty members but to presidents, vice presidents for financial affairs, and admissions officers. After the 1990s boom, and most recently since 2008, the economy has been suffering while the costs of college education have been outpacing inflation; and, to make matters worse, the federal government has been replacing more and more grants with student loans. Catholic colleges and universities, most of which are not known for large endowments that cushion the ups and downs of the economy, have been forced to increase the so-called discount rates. Twenty years ago, discount rates were not much above 30%; today, some institutions peg their tuition reductions significantly higher. Such a reality poses a new challenge for Catholic colleges to have to cobble together financial aid packages for students and parents who are themselves searching for the best financial option for their family, given the economic realities of today. Sundry other features describe the changed situations since 1990. *Catholic Higher Education: A Culture in Crisis* covers much of this other territory.

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