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HIRING TO MAINTAIN MISSION

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This article is a direct outgrowth of the appearance of Ex Corde Ecclesiae and the need for Catholic colleges and universities to address their hiring practices in order to maintain their identity as Catholic institutions of higher learning. The author draws a parallel between the personal philosophy of individuals within the community and the perceived, if not real, institutional philosophy of the college or university as Catholic. Catholic institutions can lose their souls while climbing the ladder of success and prestige simply because they have paid insufficient attention to the question of the philosophical fit between their employees and their espoused Catholic mission and philosophy. Hiring the right people will determine, in the long run, whether a Catholic college retains its Catholic identity in fact or in theory.

After more than a decade of discussion, the U.S. Catholic Bishops' Conference, on November 17, 1999, recommended to the Vatican that Pope John Paul II's Apostolic Constitution, *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* (ECE), be adopted. On May 3, 2000, the Holy See granted the Bishops' Conference its *recognitio* (formal approval) for its application of *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* to Catholic colleges and universities in the United States. The formal approval began a yearlong preparation for implementation. Precisely what the specifications will be regarding the implementation of ECE remains shrouded in uncertainty. While there is some ambiguity about the implementation phase and exactly what will happen after May 3, 2001, each Catholic college or university must assess its own situation in light of the Ordinary with whom it will be working in the future in ways in which it has not done in the past. A true paradigm shift will occur, and Catholic institutions of higher education must confront this new reality in practical, concrete terms.

AN INSTITUTION'S MISSION DRAWS FINANCIAL SUPPORT

All colleges and universities want to go to the “next level.” They want to be better than they currently are; they want to be perceived as being better; and they desire to sustain and build upon fine reputations already established. Academic communities are galvanized to go to the next level; their leaders are driven to succeed and desire to advance the stature of their institutions. Individuals know that the route to institutional success is to have access to resources and hire the best possible personnel who have the background, experience, contacts, and reputation to advance the growth and development of the institution.

Monies are pledged to colleges and universities because donors embrace the mission and philosophy of the institutions. They believe that their monies will be well used for their intended purposes and these hard-earned dollars will help propel the institution to the next level. Moreover, there is an insatiable appetite to raise as much money as can be raised in order to fulfill the noble goals and aspirations of members of the academic community. After all, it is rather easy to rally around a clarion call to excellence—to respond to a call to make sacrifices for *alma mater* (sweet mother). Individuals want to be associated with a winner; they want to have bragging rights; they want a feeling of ownership in an institution that one senses is ready to “take off and fly.”

Catholic colleges and universities share these aspirations. We, in the Catholic community, should want our colleges to fulfill their potential just as much as those who support other private and public institutions want them to do so. It takes patience, leadership, vision, perseverance, money, and the right people to achieve this goal. Institutions need the right board of trustees members; the right donors; the right students; and the right faculty, staff, and administrators. They need to recruit the “best and the brightest.” If an institution has the right personnel and the other necessary resources, then assuredly the institution can make substantial progress toward the attainment of its goals and aspirations. Under these circumstances, it seems that the ascent to the next level lies within the grasp of the institution. It makes sense, therefore, that an attempt should be made to attain this objective.

We can have the requisite facilities for our students and faculty; we can have the technological tools essential for the academic enterprise; we can pay the salaries to compete for the best faculty; we can have the funds on hand to attract the best and brightest students because we can afford to “buy” the high-achieving scholastic star. Is there anything wrong with these goals and ambitions? A very distinct mission and philosophy drive Catholic colleges and universities. It is thus essential that the best and brightest personnel the individual institutions wish to hire share and enjoy a fundamental compatibility with the mission and philosophy of the Catholic university.

LINKING PERSONAL AND INSTITUTIONAL PHILOSOPHIES

In our quest to go to the next level, in our desire to be ranked or recognized among the very best, in our efforts to recruit the very best faculty, staff, and administrators, are we paying adequate attention to the fundamental character and philosophy of candidates who present themselves to us? Are we so blinded by the brilliance of the candidates and their extraordinary resumé's that we do not establish the necessary linkage between their personal philosophy and the philosophy and mission of the institution? While individual candidates may have degrees from the very best institutions of higher learning in the country or throughout the world, while they may already have illustrious research records, and while they may have glowing recommendations from their colleagues, mentors, and friends, they may not be compatible with the mission and philosophy of the institution where they are seeking employment.

In fact, there are classic cases wherein Catholic colleges and universities have paid scant attention to the philosophical orientation of job candidates. They have hired people whose philosophy was not compatible with the institution's philosophy (Burtchaell, 1998). The initial quest in the hiring process was to hire the best and the brightest so that the institution could enhance its reputation and thereby assist in the institutional goal to go to the next level. In attempting to hire the best person for the position, emphasis was placed on the academic credentials of individual candidates and not on the question of philosophical fit.

As Catholic colleges and universities have become more sophisticated, there has been a blurring between them and other institutions of higher learning. One of the results of this in the hiring process has been to duck some issues that tend to make individuals on both sides of the interview table somewhat uncomfortable. Some personnel in Catholic universities do not like to delve into these areas for fear that to do so will reveal a lack of sophistication or a certain perceived intolerance or even a narrowness that belies the capacity to compete with the best for the best. As Gleason (1994) said:

Many of these younger faculty members consider it unprofessional—indeed, improper—to take a candidate's religion into account as a consideration in hiring. As a Jesuit writer has observed, by 1970 it had become declass  to show any interest in that dimension of a candidate's background. (pp. 101-102)

Some faculty also think that personal points of view are precisely that—personal—and should not be explored in the interviewing process. Individual candidates for positions in Catholic colleges and universities may not understand the philosophical underpinnings of the institution. Perhaps they have

had little to no education regarding a Catholic institution or the Catholic faith. Or perhaps the individual has, at best, a rather uninformed perspective on the workings of a Catholic university. Time and again, Catholic colleges and universities have indeed hired accomplished faculty members whose philosophical orientation runs counter to the institution (Burtchaell, 1998).

These individuals join departments, teach and conduct research, and serve on departmental and college-wide committees. They also serve on search committees for new faculty members and instinctively look for potential faculty members who share their philosophical orientation. As curious as it may seem, while institutions seem to have difficulty in articulating their philosophical points of view in the hiring context, individuals on search committees seem to have absolutely no difficulty in finding people who share their philosophy.

THE POTENTIAL TO LOSE THE SOUL OF THE INSTITUTION

Under these circumstances, it does not take long for a substantial number of faculty in an academic department to share a philosophy that is not compatible with the espoused institutional philosophy. In a few more years, one can find that the majority of the faculty do not enjoy a philosophical *simpatico* with the institution. At this time it may be too late to change the departmental mindset. The academic department may now rank among the very best in the land, but has the institution lost its moorings? Has it lost its soul, its *raison d'être*? Is the university still Catholic? If one accepts the representation of Burtchaell (1998) or Miscamble (1994), one must explore the question of how far the secularization of individual Catholic colleges and universities has gone and must conclude that these institutions have embarked on a slippery and treacherous slope regarding their commitment and desire to sustain themselves as Catholic. Both Burtchaell and Miscamble make it clear that they firmly believe that a number of prominent Catholic universities have moved toward secularization in the same way as have formerly Protestant institutions of higher learning.

On the other hand, Gallin (1996), in her seminal work dealing with the independence of Catholic higher education and new relationships forged by these institutions, quoted Reisman and Jencks, who also addressed the possible secularization of Catholic institutions of higher learning:

Although comparable forces (to those in Protestant-founded colleges) have been at work in Catholic education, the Catholic colleges will not necessarily become secularized either *de facto* or *de jure* as so many of the Protestant-founded ones have done and are doing.... Catholic higher education copes with secularization by partial incorporation of it. (pp. 59-60)

MISSION AND PHILOSOPHY IDENTIFY THE INSTITUTION

For an institution to be truly Catholic, Catholic theory and practice must be conjoined. Therefore, function must follow form, practice must follow theory, and what the institution espouses in its mission statement and philosophy must be lived throughout the institution and not just in isolated pockets. This Catholic philosophy must be observed not only in the academic departments of theology and philosophy but throughout the institution. Of necessity, the whole of the university must have the feel of being Catholic. This, then, should translate into the embodiment of Christian principles in action.

Just as early Christians were to be known by the ways in which they treated (loved) each other, so too Catholic colleges and universities must extend their philosophy throughout all aspects of the institution, resulting in an environment that bespeaks the institution's philosophical underpinnings. The employees of the institution must embrace the philosophy and live it out in tangible ways. However, this does not mean that the employees must be practicing Catholics or Catholic at all. One can have remarkable philosophical compatibility with a Catholic institution of higher learning and not be Catholic.

Nonetheless, it is not surprising that *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, in early iterations of the document, expressed a desire that all trustees of Catholic colleges and universities be Catholic. This language was subsequently modified somewhat, allowing that "To the extent possible, the majority of the board should be Catholics committed to the Church" (John Paul II, 1990, par. 4. 2b). However, the final version approved by the bishops indicates that the president of a Catholic university must be Catholic and calls for a majority of the faculty to be Catholic. Obviously there is the expectation that a person who is Catholic embraces Catholic philosophical principles and lives these out in the life of the institution. Unfortunately, this is not always true.

While one would like to think that Roman Catholics will operationalize their faith and, therefore, live it out in the context of the work of the university, this does not always follow. There are many Catholics who are Catholics in name only. This may have been the reality when they were initially hired at the institution, or this may have occurred after they were employed. A non-practicing Catholic may fully support on a day-to-day basis the philosophical principles of the institution, and a practicing Catholic may not embrace various aspects of the institution's philosophy for personal reasons. Non-Catholics may not have a clue about the various aspects of the institution's philosophy but instinctively embrace the fullness of what the institution intends.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE HIRING PROCESS

Hiring practices are crucial. Over the years, higher education has become more and more specialized and insular mentalities of specific disciplines have taken priority over the interests of the whole institution (Birnbaum, 1989). Hence, when we seek to add personnel to our units, we look for individuals who share with us almost a fixation on those things that will improve our unit without necessarily seeing the big picture, the whole of the institution. We are clearly looking for the best and the brightest: we are looking for the right fit. We desire to find the person who will advance the departmental agenda, and this is not necessarily one and the same with the institution as a whole.

Consequently, the search for new personnel is usually narrowly focused, and the position description centers on the unit's current needs. We are looking for an interface that will enhance the credentials of the unit, with the understanding that this new person brings to the table competencies to help take the unit to its next level. Virtually every aspect of the search is intended to find the right person; the focus is on the professional development of the candidates. The fit question deals with missing links in the multiple talents of the existing unit and the capacity to get along with the cast of characters already assembled in the unit. But too infrequently does the fit question focus on the individual's philosophy of education and life vis-à-vis the philosophy of the university. This is precisely where the problem lies.

The faculty control hiring in academic departments. While chairs and deans will see finalists for positions, deans are not ordinarily involved with all aspects of the search. They, too, want the best and the brightest. They, too, want to help take the institution to the next level. But it is the faculty who are key to the hiring, and the maintenance of the philosophical orientation of the institution is a shared responsibility—one that must be embraced both by the faculty and the administrators in the hiring process. At the same time, one must be cognizant of the philosophical premise that "You cannot give what you do not have." If participants in the hiring process are uninformed about the philosophy of the institution, indifferent to it, or opposed to it, this creates a major obstacle in sustaining the Catholic character of the institution. Under these circumstances, the odds against maintaining the core values of the institution diminish.

This begs the question: How does a Catholic university sustain its mission and philosophy? The answer lies in the institution's hiring practices. One can stipulate that if hiring practices are not addressed in the Catholic higher education community, some of these institutions will continue to be called Catholic and to call themselves Catholic, but they will have lost their real identity; they will have lost their souls. They will have done so precisely because their hiring practices failed to support and sustain the mission and

philosophy of the university as Catholic. They will have failed because they ducked the pivotal issues associated with both the character and philosophy of the individual as well as the nature, mission, and philosophy of the institution and the appropriate interface between the two. A Catholic university may wish to undertake the following steps to prevent this loss.

INSTITUTIONAL ACTION STEPS

CONDUCT AN INTERNAL SCAN

With the approval of the trustees and under the leadership of the president, the Catholic university should conduct an internal scan to determine how its hiring practices relate to the Catholic character and identity of the institution. This inquiry should be carried out openly with the understanding that whatever the results there will be no recriminations or finger pointing. The goal is to ascertain whether the institution clearly manifests its Catholic character so that the university knows what the magnitude of the job is that must be accomplished in order to advance its Catholic mission, philosophy, and character. The internal scan should also use focus groups so that students, faculty, staff, administrators, and others can comment on whether they believe the university behaves in ways that affirm its Catholic character and identity.

The issue is whether individual hiring units have taken seriously the responsibility of seeking qualified candidates who embrace or who are respectful of the institution's mission and philosophy. While this internal scan should be conducted openly, it must be done with great pastoral sensitivity so that it does not give the appearance of a witch hunt. If in any way the university conveys a second-class citizenship status to anyone within the institution, it will have sent the wrong message and will have created a climate that makes it uncomfortable for a significant number (both Catholic and non-Catholic) within the institution. While the scan will prove helpful to the institution, it must exercise significant caution regarding the manner in which it is developed, administered, and reported to the community.

REVIEW HIRING PRACTICES

Under the direction of the president, the institution should review institutional hiring practices, stating unequivocally that all searches must include a serious segment associated with the Catholic mission, philosophy, and character of the institution. All literature concerning the institution must be reviewed with an eye toward the ways in which the institution identifies itself to its internal and external constituencies. The university also must review all public statements it makes about itself, regardless of the audience, as well as all advertisements promoting any aspect of the institution, including any searches being conducted by the institution.

The institution should discern whether all searches include providing literature for the candidates that make it unequivocally clear that the institution is Catholic and that there is the expectation that candidates will appreciate and respect this tradition and ongoing commitment. This review should also manifest whether the interview process and reference checking include specific questions relating to the individual's philosophy of life and education and their congruence with the mission and philosophy of the university.

Someone in the hiring unit must be designated to discuss candidly with candidates the Catholic mission and philosophy of the institution. If no one is designated as the point person in this regard, there is the strong likelihood that the questions will not be asked. At the same time, these questions should not be stated in a defensive way, nor should they be voiced in a manner that would make a candidate uncomfortable. The human resource unit, the office of affirmative action, or the office of mission and ministry (if such exists) should hold orientation sessions for search committees to provide an understanding of the Catholic nature of the institution and to explain how to convey this reality to those being considered for hiring. Some Catholic colleges and universities have not addressed these issues for some time (Burtchaell, 1998). Some members of the community will undoubtedly find this information both helpful in the hiring process as well as to them personally in reviewing the nature of the university.

MAKE A DECLARATION OF INTENT

The institution must affirm its desire to recruit the best and brightest employees it can. It must assert to the community its desire to take the institution to the next level. It must articulate the importance of the fit of the individual not just with a particular unit of the university but with the institution as a whole. This must include a fundamental appreciation and respect for the institution's Catholic mission and philosophy. This declaration must assert that the Catholic character of the institution is its defining element.

If the institution exists under the auspices of a religious community, the qualities and characteristics of the particular community should be cited. Finally, the declaration should state categorically that the university is wedded to academic freedom, as articulated in ECE (John Paul II, 1990) and strongly supports justice, equity, and service. This declaration should be similar to "We hold these truths to be self evident," meaning that everyone who works for this Catholic university understands its core values, its reason for being, its mission and philosophy, and its commitment to excellence in the Catholic tradition. This declaration of intent should be made available to anyone expressing interest in possible employment at the university so that from the very outset the candidate has a bona fide understanding of the shared values of the Catholic community.

DEVELOP SPECIFIC LITERATURE

Each institution enjoys its own characteristics and should identify itself to its various constituencies. To that end, each Catholic university must develop a statement that defines the nature of the institution and spells out its mission, philosophy, and character (John Paul II, 1990). This mission and philosophy statement should speak to both the Catholic and non-Catholic populations employed at the institution, creating an intellectual and philosophical home for both groups. At the same time, the institution must not employ semantics in clouding the true nature of the institution as Catholic. Speaking to this issue, Burtchaell (1998) said that “There were very few eyes sharp enough to deconstruct the promotional literature and notice that ‘Catholic’ had become a recessive descriptor, which began to be downplayed and then omitted as a reminder of a bygone narrowness” (p. 656). This observation strikes at the heart of the importance of developing appropriate literature that articulates faithfully the nature, character, and mission of the Catholic university.

REVIEW THE INTERVIEW PROCESS

In the hiring process, the institution must present itself unabashedly as Catholic. It must be unapologetic about its mission and philosophy. Article 4, 3b of ECE (John Paul II, 1990) stipulates that “The administration should inform faculty and staff at the time of their appointment regarding the Catholic identity, mission, and religious practices of the university.” In fact, this point of view must be stated before the time of appointment. At the same time, the institution must create a welcoming environment wherein people of all faiths and backgrounds can find an intellectual and philosophical home.

In reflecting on the importance of an appropriate interview process, Parker (1997) discussed an interview process in which she participated at Scranton University:

Mission came up in the interviews not as some sort of litmus test but as a way of informing candidates about the University’s strong sense of its identity as an institution in the Jesuit Catholic tradition and inviting them to discuss how their own “mission” might correspond. (p. 23)

The kinds of questions that search committees should ask of candidates are rather simple and straightforward; they include the following: Will you tell us about yourself? Who and what have been the most profound influences in your life? Why? What things are most important to you? Why? What has informed your value system? How would you describe your value system? Do you understand the nature and mission of this university? Do you believe that your personal value system is compatible with the mission and philosophy of this institution? Is there any tension between your philosophy of life

and education and the nature and character of this institution as a Catholic university? Is there any incongruity between anything in your personal and professional background and this institution that is of concern to you? If so, what may that be?

Each of these questions invites follow-up, and the wise interviewer will discern whether the candidate has read and understood the institution's literature. The interviewer must also allow candidates to ask questions so that they can make an informed decision about the institution. While most of the questions raised with candidates will focus on the sought-after position, these issues surrounding the mission and philosophy of the institution will go a long way towards hiring personnel who are compatible with the institution, thereby safeguarding the basic integrity of the university as Catholic. As Hesburgh (1994) said:

It is not that all must be philosophers and theologians but all should have some concern about the philosophical and theological implications of all human activity. There ought to be some universities where all of this is true and appreciated if both the challenge and promise of the Catholic university are to be met in our times. (p. 372)

A CASE STUDY

Any search being conducted must begin with a self-assessment of the needs of the department. As this is being conducted, the members of an academic department should meet with the dean to explore all aspects of the department, its self-assessment, and exactly what it is looking for in the prospective new member of the faculty. During this meeting, the dean should lay out clear expectations about the qualities to be found in the successful candidate. They need to include the academic credentials and experience of individuals as well as their personal qualities, attributes, and philosophy. Candidates also need to know the criteria upon which they are going to be judged. Moreover, the dean should state unambiguously that the individual's philosophy of life and education must be compatible with the mission and philosophy of the institution as Catholic.

If a religious community sponsors the university, the individual should also be compatible with the charisms of that community. The dean spells out these issues at the beginning of the search so there is no question later whether the successful individual is in synchrony with the mission and philosophy of the institution. This internal review allows the dean to review the institution's history and philosophy, and this can serve as a refresher for current members of the community about the nature, mission, and philosophy of the university.

The advertising for the position should conform to the guidelines outlined above. Advertisements and literature provided for prospective candi-

dates should speak with one voice in articulating the Catholic character of the institution. The search committee seeks the best qualified candidates for the academic position with the understanding that the preferred candidate must be *simpatico* with the mission and philosophy of the university.

The hiring process is a joint responsibility between the faculty and the administration and they must be on the same page in seeking the most appropriate candidates for the department and university. If faculty members do not examine this question, they then place the onus on the dean or vice-president (or president) to reject a candidate on the basis of philosophical incompatibility. This will cause a significant strain on the relationship between the dean and the faculty and will harm the faculty's principal role in the hiring process. While deans will want to support candidates recommended by the faculty, they may be unable to do so because of the incompatibility issue. However, in this scenario, the dean is safeguarding the mission and philosophy of the institution's shared responsibility of both the faculty and the administration.

Another way to safeguard the probity of the search process is to ensure that complete reference checks are made. Besides learning a great deal about the candidate's personal and professional attributes and qualifications, the institution's representative may also learn whether or not, in the estimation of the candidate's references, the candidate is compatible with the mission and philosophy of the institution. This question of philosophical fit may be difficult for some references to answer because they may not be familiar with a Catholic university or the personal philosophy of the individual candidate. In large part, the reference check's ultimate success will depend upon the capacity of the interviewer to elicit the information by asking the correct questions. Hence, those conducting these interviews should undergo training in order to complete this assignment successfully. In the final analysis, it will be the candidates themselves who will best be able to manifest their comfort level and capacity to support the mission and philosophy of the Catholic university.

Once the academic unit has forwarded to the administration its hiring recommendation, the appropriate institutional personnel enact the ordinary hiring procedures. The administrators involved need to assure themselves that not only are the academic credentials of the candidate of choice in order but that the philosophical fit question has been put to rest. If these safeguards are in place, the institution has done all that it can to find the right person to sustain not only the academic excellence of the institution but also its mission and philosophy. If it does not do so, the words of Araujo (1999) will haunt some Catholic colleges and universities:

If affirmative steps are not taken to address the erosion in religiously affiliated higher education, it is quite possible, even inevitable, that the Catholic university will become extinct not because of voluntary decision but because critical employment appointments could not be made with mission oriented goals in mind. (p. 840)

While the foregoing action steps are clearly aimed at addressing new personnel who may join an academic community, one should stipulate that these issues are not all inclusive nor are they to be aimed at only certain classes of potential employees. All future employees should undergo this kind of review. For those already employed at a Catholic college, and for whom the questions of mission and philosophy are a concern, the institution should hold a series of workshops open to the entire community to deal with them.

CONCLUSION

By raising the consciousness of the community about hiring to maintain mission, the university signifies that mission and philosophy are central to its being and that it will continue to place front and center its understanding of itself as Catholic. Those who may have seen ambiguity about the mission and philosophy of the institution will take from these conversations a different understanding of the university. Over time those Catholic institutions of higher learning that wish to proclaim or reclaim their Catholic heritage in word and action will be able to do so because they will have assembled a critical mass to sustain and advance their mission, character, and philosophy.

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