

# IMMACULATE CONCEPTION SEMINARY

## SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

### NEWMAN'S IDEA IN THE MINDS OF AMERICAN EDUCATORS

Philip Gleason

Archbishop Gerety Lecture at Seton Hall University, February 5, 1997

#### Introduction

It is a great honor to be asked to give the Archbishop Gerety Lecture for 1997, and I thank you for it. At the same time, however, I confess to some trepidation in coming before you since I propose to speak of Cardinal Newman and there are people here who know much more about him than I do. My interest in him grows out of the work I did on the history of Catholic higher education, for the name of Newman and his classic Idea of a University came up repeatedly in my research. That suggested a follow-up study of how that book had been received and what kind of influence it had on American educators. Surprisingly enough, no one has made such a study before, so I am emboldened to give it a try, despite being a novice in the field of Newman scholarship.

For a historian like myself, tracing the resonance of Newman's Idea in the minds of American educators is worthwhile for its own sake. But does such a study have anything beyond "merely historical" interest? Does it have any relevance to our understanding of present-day educational issues, or of Newman himself? Opinions on that no doubt differ -- although I hope the differences will be less after I have finished talking. However that may be, the record shows that many Americans have resorted to Newman for intellectual ammunition in controversy -- or, in calmer circumstances, to buttress arguments they were advancing. That means lots of people have thought Newman was relevant to their situation. And a look at this record, so rich in controversy, can I believe deepen our understanding of Newman's way of thinking. That will have to do for the moment; we will return to the question later.

Besides the matter of relevance, there is another preliminary question we must confront. Is 'The Idea of a University' a "classic" in the sense of being a book everyone has heard of, but no one really reads? I'm sure that is not true of this audience, but since since most of you probably did not re-read it in preparation for this occasion, let me say a few words about the book by way of background.

The book as we have it dates from 1873 and consists of two parts. Part I comprises nine "discourses" which set forth the basic theoretical principles of Newman's "idea" of university education. Two of these principles stand out: 1) the crucial role of theology in university studies; and 2) the point that cultivation of the intellect, not mere acquisition of knowledge or preparation for a career, is the primary goal of university education. Part II of the Idea gives us ten essays on various aspects of university study which are intended to illustrate the general principles expounded in Part I. Some of the essays, such as those on "Literature" and "Christianity and Scientific Investigation," are frequently cited, but the nine discourses of Part I are what people usually have in mind when they speak of 'The Idea of a University'.

The two parts existed independently and with different titles before being brought together in 1873 as the Idea. This fact -- along with the existence of a third book by Newman called *The Office and Work of Universities* -- makes for a rather confusing publication history. For our purposes it will suffice to observe that all three of these works derive from Newman's role as founding rector of the Catholic University in Ireland in the years 1851 to 1858. What became Part I of the Idea were lectures he gave when the university was still in the planning stage. They were published in Dublin in 1852 under the title, *Discourses on the Scope and Nature of University Education*; a revised edition appeared in London in 1859, and Newman revised them again for the Idea. The essays that make up Part II of the Idea were composed by Newman for various academic occasions after the university got under way and were collected as a book entitled *Lectures and Essays on University Subjects*. That book appeared in 1859, the same year as the second edition of the original discourses. Three years earlier (i.e., 1856), the previously mentioned *Office and Work of Universities* came out. Though never part of *The Idea of a University*, this collection of Newman's informal sketches of university history was the first of his educational writings to reach these shores. And to confuse the picture further, *The Office and Work of Universities* was later re-issued as *The Rise and Progress of Universities*, and later still as *University Sketches*.

With these brief remarks for background, we turn now to our subject proper -- how Newman's Idea was received in America. The story falls into four chronological phases, the first of which covers the period 1852 to 1890 -- that is, from the delivery of Newman's discourses in Dublin until the year of his death.

## I. Early Impact (1852-1890)

The overall context of this phase of early impact was charged with controversy. At the most general level, the Revolutions of 1848 heightened already existing tensions between the Church and liberalism and fueled bitter anti-clericalism on the Continent. In England and the United States, anti-Catholicism reached almost hysterical levels in the early 1850s. In Ireland, the university question itself grew out of religious controversy that centered on education. More precisely, the issue concerned the so-called "mixed education" that was to be offered by the newly-created Queen's Colleges, which were designed to be religiously neutral institutions open to Catholics as well as Protestants. Although this was an improvement over the existing discrimination against Catholics in higher education, many Irish remained deeply suspicious of English intentions -- especially since the British government seemed indifferent to Irish suffering in the Great Famine that struck just as the Queens College plan was broached.

But despite their long-standing grievances against England, the Irish bishops could not present a united front on the question of mixed education. Several opposed the idea vigorously; others, however, thought the Queens Colleges were the best they could hope for, and most middle class lay Catholics agreed with the latter view. Since they couldn't come to any conclusion among themselves, the bishops referred the question to Rome for a solution. There Pius IX saw in "mixed education" an example of the liberalism against which he meant to do battle. The Irish bishops, he said, should set up their own strictly Catholic university.

This was the institution to which Newman was called as rector. Although a stranger to Irish affairs, he knew very well he was stepping into a potential minefield. He therefore shaped the Discourses he gave to initiate the project with an eye to the disagreements that existed among his listeners in Dublin. In stressing the crucial role of theology in university studies, Newman addressed the concerns of those who rejected the Queens Colleges. But by referring to his Oxford experience, and insisting that cultivation of the intellect would be the new university's primary goal, he reassured lay Catholics that it would not be a strictly clerical school. This careful attention to the divergent expectations of his audience helped make Newman's lectures a great hit in Dublin. However, they were interrupted when he had to rush back to England to defend himself in a libel suit that grew out of the religious polemics set off by the restoration of Catholic hierarchy in 1850. The sensational nature of this affair perhaps obscured Newman's other activities, for when the Dublin Discourses were published a few months later, they passed almost completely unnoticed in England.

That was also true of non-Catholics in this country. So far as I have been able to discover, only two nineteenth-century Protestant educators even alluded to Newman's work. Among American Catholics, however, the situation was quite different. They knew about the Irish university project from the beginning, and the example it furnished, along with Newman's writings, played a significant role in the establishment of the Catholic University of America, which opened its doors the year before Newman died.

We have the very best kind of evidence that American Catholics knew about the Irish university -- namely, the fact that they gave a lot of money to help get it started. This came about because the promoters of the university dispatched two priests who spent well over a year canvassing for contributions from the eastern seaboard to the Mississippi River. These "Rev. Delegates," as they were called, appealed to ethnic feeling as well as to religion by portraying the Queens Colleges as an English plot to rob the Irish of their nationality, and proclaiming that the new university would restore "Ireland's ancient unrivalled fame in letters." They usually preached in churches, but also appeared before humble groups like the Quarrymen's Union Benevolent Society of New York. The Quarrymen could afford to give only \$110, but the total amount raised was impressive: about \$40,000 by 1853 -- and this in addition to contributions made to help Newman defray the costs of his libel suit.

Nationalism entered the picture more disruptively when Newman invited the great American convert, Orestes A. Brownson, to join the faculty of the new university. This occurred at the very height of American nativism and the problem was that Brownson had just published two highly imprudent articles on that subject. Although critical of Know-Nothing bigotry, Brownson acknowledged that the behavior of Irish newcomers gave some cause for complaint, and he agreed with the nativists in urging immigrants to become Americanized. To Irish Catholics hard-pressed by external enemies, this was treason most foul. Great was their outrage and report of it carried across the Atlantic. In Ireland it reinforced the suspicions of nationalists who had never been enthusiastic about having an Englishman -- and a recent convert to boot -- at the head of their university. To defuse the situation, an embarrassed Newman had to withdraw the invitation to Brownson.

A less dramatic but far more important kind of ideological conflict shaped the campaign to establish Catholic universities in both Ireland and the United States. I am referring to the growing awareness among Catholics in those days that the real threat to faith came, not from formal heresy or from traditional Protestant foes, but from the "deep, plausible skepticism" that permeated thought. Newman himself painted a dismaying picture the accelerating tendency toward atheism, analyzed its workings in the learned world with stunning acuity, and devoted Discourse IX of *The Idea of a University* to showing that, without the effective presence of the Church as a counter-influence, higher education tended inevitably to reinforce the drift toward atheism. In this context it is hardly surprising that American Catholics felt that they too needed a Catholic University, that the Irish initiative served as an early stimulus, and that Newman's writings figured prominently in the campaign to bring one into existence.

Brownson, who had long believed Catholic education needed thorough reform, took note of Newman's writings in the 1850s, and after the Civil War virtually everyone who promoted the establishment of the Catholic University of America paid homage to *The Idea of a University* as a "classic which [the world] will not willingly let perish." That was especially the case with Bishop John Lancaster Spalding of Peoria, whose persistent agitation was the single most important factor in persuading his brother bishops to commit themselves to the creation of such an institution. This was a major commitment, for though it was to begin with a theological faculty only, the Catholic University of America was designed from the beginning to be a real graduate-level university -- and that would make it an altogether different kind of institution from the existing Catholic colleges, which might call themselves universities,

but were essentially high schools.

Like other Catholics, Spalding looked upon a university as the best means of meeting the threat of infidelity, and he echoed Newman in asserting that "the great intellectual work of the church in our day is to show that theology ... is the essential and central point of union of the whole scientific group [of universities studies]." Yet he did not want an institution designed to turn out "profound theologians, or learned exegetes, or skillful metaphysicians or specialists of any kind." Like Newman, he wanted a university that would "impart not professional skill but cultivation of mind," that would strengthen and refine the intellect rather than storing the memory. Not only did Spalding refer to and quote from Newman to buttress his argument, his line of reasoning and even his prose itself followed Newman's so closely as to border occasionally on plagiarism. Consider the following example:

The education of which I speak is expansion and discipline of mind rather than learning; and its tendency is not so much to form ... [scholarly specialists] as to cultivate a habit of mind, which, for want of a better word, may be called philosophical; to enlarge the intellect, to strengthen and [make] supple its faculties, to enable it to take connected views of things and their relations, and to see clear amid the mazes of human error and through the mists of human passion.

Though this Newmanian vision inspired Spalding's drive to bring it into being, it did not shape the university's functioning once it was established. On the contrary, the Catholic University of America accepted the research emphasis sweeping through American higher education at the time and bent its efforts toward producing the learned specialists of whom Spalding spoke with near disdain. Even more ironically, Spalding too was by that time moving away from Newman -- although not in the direction of Germanic Wissenschaft. In his last major statement on the subject -- an address given at the cornerstone laying of the university's first building -- Spalding left Newman far behind in his enthusiasm for modern progress. But while he hailed the achievements of modern science and scholarship, he still insisted that the university should "make culture its first aim." Now, however, Spalding's understanding of "culture" owed more to Matthew Arnold than to Newman, for he invested it with quasi-religious value. "Mind," he proclaimed in his loftiest rhetorical flight, "is Heaven's pioneer making way for faith, hope, and love, for higher aims and nobler life..." To be human "is to be intelligent and moral, and therefore religious. ... He who believes in culture must believe in God; for what but God do we mean when we talk of loving the best thoughts and the highest beauty."

## II The Modernist Interlude (1890-1914)

The Catholic University's developing along conventional research-university lines, and Spalding's turn toward Arnold, presaged a period in which Newman's Idea of a University dropped into relative obscurity. This second chapter in our story, which we can call "The Modernist Interlude," extends from the 1890s to the First World War. During that epoch, other aspects of Newman's thought received much more attention than the Idea, and Catholic educators had their hands full dealing with practical issues on which Newman's book shed no very useful light. Both of these shifts involved a great deal of controversy, but the circumstances had changed greatly since the 1850s.

The most intense controversy centered around the movement called Modernism, which Pope Pius X condemned as a heresy in 1907. The condemnation resulted from the Pope's conviction that the liberals were watering down essential Catholic doctrine in the vain effort to make it acceptable to modern thinkers. Modernism was really a European phenomenon, but it bore a clear family resemblance to the Americanism of the 1890s, and it had faint but audible echoes in the United States at the time of its condemnation. In recent years, Catholic scholars have largely rehabilitated the Modernists. But in the days when it was held to be an undoubted heresy, anyone who exhibited the least tendency toward Modernism was suspect. To a certain extent, that happened to Newman, for though he died before the movement took shape, he was often called its precursor.

While he never accepted the "liberalism" that emptied religion of its objective and dogmatic elements, Newman did oppose the extreme rigorism of "ultramontane" Catholicism as it developed after the proclamation of papal infallibility in 1870. In that sense, he was a liberal and the later Modernists admired him for it. But his writings were even more important in establishing Newman's stature among the Modernists. Not, however, his Idea of the University. The key works for them were the *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, which accorded with their historicism and conviction of the need for change, and the *Grammar of Assent*, with its subtle analysis of the psychology of religious belief. The first of these books inspired several articles from Alfred Loisy, the most important of the Modernists. Another, Henri Bremond, wrote one of the earliest biographies of Newman as an essay in religious psychology.

Modernist admiration for Newman was not unqualified, for they knew he would never have gone as far as they thought necessary. But their sympathy for his general approach and their many references to his writings were enough to make the *Development of Christian Doctrine* and the *Grammar of Assent* suspect during the anti-Modernist reaction that followed condemnation of the movement. On the whole, however, American Catholic educators did not seem to pay much attention to these matters. Indeed, I can recall only one cautionary reference to these books, and that came from a person very favorably disposed toward Newman. As I said before, Catholic educators were much more concerned with practical problems. Yet there is a different kind of link with Newman here -- one associated with what was coming to be known in the those days as "the Newman movement."

Newman Clubs, as those of a certain age will remember, were organizations designed to provide pastoral care for, and opportunities for social interaction among, Catholic students on the campuses of non-Catholic colleges and universities. In the early days of their organization, not all of these "Catholic clubs" took Newman's name, but by World War I it was firmly attached to the movement. The Idea of a University did not, however, play the same role in inspiring this movement as it did in the campaign to found the Catholic University of America. Such Catholic clubs were, in fact, closer in spirit to Newman's later concern for getting Catholic students admitted to Oxford and providing for their pastoral needs -- a shift of emphasis one scholar interprets as showing that after his disappointments in Dublin, Newman changed his mind about whether a strictly Catholic university should be the goal.

Be that as it may, the rapid spread of Newman Clubs in the years after 1900 was extremely disturbing to those in charge of Catholic colleges. For though they had to admit that students on non-Catholic campuses needed pastoral care, they didn't want to encourage attendance at such institutions. Since they feared that elaborate provision for Catholic centers at state universities and other "secular" schools would do just that, they regarded the Newman movement with considerable uneasiness. In fact, they tried to get the bishops to mandate attendance at Catholic colleges just as they had mandated attendance at parochial schools. That didn't work, but the whole issue dramatized the fact that Catholic colleges were losing their clientele and helped to set off organizational and curricular reforms that dominated the landscape of Catholic higher education from 1900 to 1920.

The general tendency of these reforms was away from concentration on the classical languages, the study of which Newman endorsed in the Idea, and toward the professionalism he deprecated. That explains why the leading promoters of the reform movement had little to say about Newman. But the changes they pushed through were highly controversial, and it is surprising that the conservative opposition failed to enlist Newman in its defense of the old ways. One reason may have been that the Jesuits were the most prominent opponents of reform, and they were so married to their particular version of the classical liberal arts curriculum that they didn't see the relevance of Newman's book until very late in the game.

Of course it was not altogether overlooked in those days. On the contrary, we can safely say that all Catholic educators venerated Newman in a general way, and quite a few made passing reference to *The Idea of a University*. In 1914 a speaker at the Catholic Educational Association's annual meeting called the book "certainly a standard work," adding that anyone who dealt with the subject of liberal education could hardly avoid "fall[ing] into the phraseology of Newman." The same speaker, incidentally, was the first to make a point echoed by many later commentators, viz., that Newman's "university" is really what Americans would call a liberal arts college. But despite this kind of attention, the Modernist interlude was a period of neglect compared to the epoch that followed.

### III The Golden Age of Newman's Idea

That third epoch, which extends from World War I to 1960, was the golden age of Newman's Idea. In what follows, I will first sketch the evidence that justifies calling it that, and then suggest some reasons why *The Idea of a University* had such visibility and influence in that era.

One thing that added to its visibility was that non-Catholic educators finally started paying attention to it. In 1915 the *London Times* observed that although Newman had "not been accepted as a great educational writer, except by Roman Catholics of the intellectual type," his work was actually well worth reading. In the 1920s, the earlier praise of Walter Pater, who called the Idea "the perfect handling of a theory," and of Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch, who held it up as a model for writers, reached American audiences. Quiller-Couch added, incidentally, that its earlier neglect was partly explainable by Newman's association with "a religion still unpopular in England."

The first significant non-Catholic voice in this country was that of Charles F. Thwing, the president of Western Reserve University and a prolific writer on higher education, who called the Idea "that precious book," and quoted from it at length on the eve of World War I. In the 1930s, Abraham Flexner and Robert M. Hutchins cited it in their critiques of American higher education, and the president of the University of Minnesota was said to keep a copy on his desk and dip into it to "refresh his spirit ...whenever a free moment presented itself." But the real breakthrough in respect to mainstream academic interest took place only after World War II. Then -- almost a century late, one might say -- came three major events: the chapter on the book in the 1945 biography of Newman by Charles F. Harrold of Ohio State University; the same author's edition of *The Idea of a University* in 1947; and the appearance in 1955 of *The Imperial Intellect*, a brilliant study of Newman's educational thought by Dwight Culler of Yale.

Among Catholics, there was a veritable explosion of interest. Newman clubs multiplied on non-Catholic campuses and began to take greater notice of their patron's educational ideas. On Catholic campuses, students began to hear that reading *The Idea of a University* should mark an "epoch" in one's intellectual life, and a 1924 survey showed that their teachers gave it first place among the ten best Catholic books in the English language. The young lay scholar, George N. Shuster had already devoted three chapters to Newman in his *Catholic Spirit in Modern English Literature* (1922), and another lay professor was guiding the Catholic Literary Club of Pittsburgh in its exploration of Newman's writings. The Jesuits, however, seized the lead in promoting the great English cardinal. His most enthusiastic champion was Fr. Daniel O'Connell of Xavier University in Cincinnati, who wrote a half-dozen articles urging college study of Newman's writings -- which he rather strangely characterized as "a veritable eureka" for Catholics. To assist this program in a practical way, O'Connell edited versions of *The Idea of a University*, *The Present Position of Catholics in England*, and the *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* suitable for classroom use. Evidence that it was catching on is furnished by the following course description, which appeared in several Jesuit college catalogues:

Newman: His commanding position in the religious intellectual life of the nineteenth century; life and associations at Oxford; Catholic life; his philosophy of education in *The Idea of a University*; his controversial, apologetic and homiletic works; the great Christian protagonist in the warfare of modern rationalism; the acknowledged perfection of form in his prose.

By 1930, two teachers' manuals to accompany such courses had already appeared. Calvert Alexander's book entitled *The Catholic Literary Revival* -- a much broader study that came out in 1935 -- greatly accelerated their development. Alexander portrayed Newman's conversion as the initial spark of the revival of Catholic intellectual and life that was still going on. His book inspired scores of college courses on the revival that featured Newman prominently, and quite a few that were devoted exclusively to his writings. I myself took one of the latter sort at the University of Dayton in the late 1940s. It wasn't very demanding, I'm afraid -- all I can remember reading was *The Idea of a University*.

But interest in Newman was not confined to the college classroom. The centenary of the Oxford Movement in 1933; of Newman's conversion in 1945; and of his *Dublin Discourses* in 1952 attracted much attention. Catholics marked these occasions with conferences, symposia, articles, and books, the most

notable of which was Newman's *Idea and Reality*, by Fergal McGrath, SJ, a major contribution to scholarship. And of course Catholics who participated in the midcentury discussion of liberal education made frequent mention of Newman. Two works that deserve special mention in this connection are Leo R. Ward's *Blueprint for a Catholic University* (1949), which devoted an entire chapter to analyzing the contemporary relevance of the *Idea*, and Justus George Lawler's *The Catholic Dimension of Higher Education* (1959), a book steeped in Newman's thought and published by a press named after him. By the end of our third phase in 1960, interest in his educational ideas was lively enough to justify two new paperback editions of the *Idea*. One appeared in Doubleday's Catholic series called *Image books*; the other, helpfully introduced and annotated by Loyola University's Martin J. Svaglic, took its place among the "Rinehart Editions," a series aimed at the general college market.

So much for the evidence showing that this was the *Idea's* golden age. Now we must try to account for the phenomenon. One explanatory factor -- the three centenaries that focussed attention on Newman and his works -- has already been touched upon. Another -- the continuing growth of American higher education -- was relevant in at least three ways. It permitted the development of scholarly specialties like Victorian literature, in which Professors Harrold, Culler, and Svaglic worked. It enlarged the potential student audience for Newman's writings at the graduate as well as undergraduate level. And it enhanced the importance of, and public interest in, questions of educational policy such as those dealt with in *The Idea of a University*. The third of these considerations was especially relevant in the post-World War II years, in which a revival of religion coincided with a marked renewal of concern for liberal (as it was often called) "general" education.

This brings us to ideological factors, for the postwar interest in religion and liberal arts had a definitely conservative coloration, and so too did the Newman of the *Idea's* golden age. In fact, Russell Kirk included a lengthy discussion of Newman in his *Conservative Mind*, the best known work of the so-called New Conservatism of the 1950s. Among Catholics, the ideological factor was the real key to the Newman revival, but it emerged in the 1920s and in a way harked back to the Newman of the 1850s.

The most obvious parallel between the two eras is found in O'Connell's re-issue of *The Present Position of Catholics in England*, a masterpiece of controversy in which Newman excoriated the No-Popery of his day. O'Connell stressed the relevance of this work to contemporary anti-Catholicism -- here readers would find that every wild charge "flung upon the gale" by the Ku Klux Klan of the 1920s had already been demolished by Newman in 1851. But beyond the level of crude prejudice, there was a deeper parallel -- in both eras, Newman stood forth as the champion of Catholic truth, Catholic learning, and Catholic culture against the irreligious spirit of the age. *The Idea of a University* with its insistence on theology, its exaltation of intellectual cultivation, and its serene assurance that faith and knowledge are compatible, was the classic statement of this ideal of Catholic culture. That explains why O'Connell put out his classroom edition of the *Idea* in 1927, and why the book remained a central feature of the intellectual and cultural revival that dominated the American Catholic landscape for the next quarter century.

This consideration also helps us understand why Newman's work found a wider audience after World War II. Six years of horror and devastation, followed by the brooding threat of nuclear destruction, confirmed his insight that mere human knowledge and human reason could never contend successfully "against those giants, the passion and the pride of man." In the ensuing "age of anxiety," religious faith regained some of its former intellectual respectability, and literate readers were drawn to what one Newman scholar called "the morally serious in literature." In that spiritual climate, *The Idea of a University* struck a more resonant chord among Americans than it ever had before.

But besides the nice fit between its theological emphasis and this broad cultural conservatism, *The Idea of a University* stood for a type of educational conservatism that was making a strong comeback, namely, the revival of the traditional ideal of liberal education. This revival came about as a delayed reaction to turn-of-the-century curricular reforms -- especially the widespread introduction of the elective system -- which, according to devotees of the liberal arts, rendered American higher education both superficial and incoherent. Robert M. Hutchins, president of the University of Chicago, who struggled to replace the frivolities of "athleticism," "collegiatism," and "vocationalism" with the metaphysics of Aristotle and Aquinas, led the fight in the 1930s. After the war, he was joined by a host of others convinced that the crisis of the age demanded a revitalization of humanistic culture that only the liberal arts could provide. Catholics, who regarded themselves as the special champions of liberal education, endorsed the goals of this movement wholeheartedly, and often invoked "the great name of Newman." Justifiable as that was, it must also be said that some who did so were such rigid traditionalists that they helped discredit his authority by wrongly making it seem that *The Idea of a University* ruled out higher education's serving any kind of practical or vocational purpose.

#### IV Eclipse and Reappearance

Moving now from the conservatism of the 1950s to the radicalism of the sixties, we enter upon the final chapter of our story, which I will call "Eclipse and Reappearance." Since it comes all the way to the present, we lack the perspective on this epoch that only time can give; what I have to say about it must therefore be regarded as provisional. Even so, it seems clear that *The Idea of a University* lost ground in the tumultuous decade of the sixties; began to regain its cultural standing as those storms abated; and has very recently been linked once again with cultural and religious conservatism.

First as to its losing ground in the sixties. Some of you will recall that those were the days of "campus unrest," as it was euphemistically called -- protests, strikes, sit-ins, buildings occupied and even bombed, police busts and bloodied victims. In that febrile atmosphere, few thought it worthwhile to take up Newman's ancient text. And though the disturbances sprang in large measure from humanistic idealism, the students' passion for "relevance," for ideas that could be put to work immediately to "change the system," was quite alien to Newman's dedication to knowledge that had no end beyond itself. And how would Newman's "gentleman" have fared in those days? Is it not pathetic as well as comical to picture him at the Berkeley of the "filthy speech movement," utterly out of place with his "cultivated intellect ... delicate taste ... candid, equitable, dispassionate mind ... noble and courteous bearing in the conduct of life"?

It is true that some representatives of the hated "establishment," such as Clark Kerr and Jacques Barzun, alluded to *The Idea of a University*. But that did little to redeem it in the eyes of the reformers. Besides, Kerr cited it primarily to dramatize the contrast between the modern "multiversity" and what Newman had in mind. It didn't rate a single mention in a major history of American higher education published in 1965; three years later, an authoritative study of the ongoing Academic Revolution took passing notice of "Newman Societies," but nothing more. Even Father Hesburgh of Notre Dame, who venerated Newman and reaffirmed the crucial role of theology in the university, emphasized the remoteness of his vision from contemporary realities. Aside from using the passage about the mind's need for elbow room as a proof-text in the campaign for academic freedom, Catholics rarely referred to *The Idea of a University* in the sixties. I know of only one substantial effort to relate it to the current scene -- and that was made by George Shuster, whose admiration for Newman dated back to the 1920s.

But this does not mean that Newman was forgotten by Catholics. What actually happened was a virtual replay of the Modernist Interlude. For as the Idea faded into the background, the Newman of the *Development of Doctrine*, the *Apologia*, and the *Grammar of Assent* took center stage once more. The catalyst of this "rediscovery of Newman," as a volume published in 1967 called it, was the Second Vatican Council of which Newman was often called the spiritual father. And though one may doubt that very many of the prelates in attendance were directly influenced by him, the Council certainly moved in directions that Newman had anticipated, not just in respect to the idea of development, but also ecclesiology, ecumenism, and the role of the laity.

This opens up many important questions on which much has been written. But it would be out of place to enter upon these matters, even if I were competent to discuss them. For our purposes, the main point is simply that the Newman of the Idea was, for a number of years, quite overshadowed by a different Newman -- a more liberal, anti-authoritarian Newman. Indeed, some commentators betrayed a hint of embarrassment about the Newman hailed in preconciliar days as a hero of Catholic culture -- the Newman who opposed "mixed education" and derided Protestant prejudice so scornfully. Catholics of the ghetto era had, according to one writer, taken a very narrow view of Newman, admiring him for the wrong reasons; another suggested that in later life Newman himself had come around to favoring mixed education at the university level.

But as we all know, the fervor of the sixties did not last. Things would never be the same as they had been before, in the Church or in American society -- and that most definitely included higher education! Yet over the next two decades, a more conservative spirit reasserted itself. One of its manifestations was the growing fear that Catholic colleges and universities were losing -- or had already lost! -- their Catholic character. In these circumstances, the Newman who steadfastly opposed religious liberalism and championed the dogmatic principle began to attract attention once again. On the broader scene of American higher education, challenges stemming from the 1960s, as well as growth and change since then, had the effect of revitalizing debate over the kind of basic issues dealt with in *The Idea of a University*. These ideological factors gave added impetus to scholarly interest in Newman, already reawakened by the Council and given an additional boost by the centenary of Newman's death in 1890.

Ian T. Ker's authoritative and fully annotated edition of *The Idea of a University*, which appeared in 1976, was a major event on the scholarly front. Soon thereafter, J. M. Cameron, who had earlier said that modern educational thinking was little more than "a series of footnotes" to Newman, used the Idea as his point of departure for reflections on higher education in the present. The same approach was carried much further by Jaroslav Pelikan in his *The Idea of the University: A Reconsideration*, which came out in 1992. Although far from uncritical, Pelikan found Newman a rewarding partner in a "dialogue" on the nature and purpose of higher education, and his must surely be the most audacious effort on record to use a book more than a century old as the prism for analyzing the current scene. But Yale professor Frank Turner's 1996 edition of the Idea brings Newman even more directly into confrontation with the present. Besides supplying "questions for reflection" and other helps to the reader, Turner's edition includes five "interpretive essays" by leading scholars who range from an advocate of religion in higher education, through a representative of postmodernism, to a visionary of the "electronic university."

Last Fall, Turner's edition was reviewed in a militantly conservative student publication at Notre Dame, under the heading, "Newman's Dangerous Idea." Although heartened by its appearance, the reviewer felt that neither Turner nor the other commentators went far enough in expounding what he called the book's twofold thesis -- "first, that a university must serve intellectual truth as its immediate end, and second that, intellectual truth being a good in itself but not the highest good, a university must serve the Church as its ultimate end." This is but one of an increasing number of instances in which the anti-liberal Newman has been enlisted by conservatives in our currently raging ideological wars. The earliest example I have come across is a 1988 symposium more or less explicitly dedicated to reclaiming him from "fashionable Catholic theologians" who "previously made a sport of setting up Newman as a peritus in theological relativism..." Not all of the contributors to this collection struck so polemical a note, but the one who dealt with "Newman's Idea of a Catholic University" was quite harsh in his treatment of Catholic educational leaders who sold out to "the senile decrees of a dying liberalism."

In 1993 the conservative trend institutionalized itself in the "Cardinal Newman Society for the Preservation of Catholic Higher Education." This body, which held its first annual meeting in Washington last October, encourages publications like Notre Dame's *Right Reason*, has its own web-page, and publishes a newsletter whose title, *The Turnaround*, epitomizes the society's understanding of its mission. Indeed, it claims to have made a difference already by creating a counter-voice to that of the Catholic educational establishment -- the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities -- and thereby helping to prevent the guidelines for applying *Ex Corde Ecclesia* to the United States from being a "total defeat."

#### Concluding Remarks

On that embattled note we conclude our survey of Newman's Idea in the minds of American educators -- or, more accurately, Americans concerned about education. It is, perhaps, disheartening to find it still enmeshed in ideological controversy. But that has always been the case with Newman's broader legacy, which opposing factions have claimed and put to contradictory uses.

To my mind, that confirms the perennial relevance of Newman's thought. But does it not also raise a question about his intellectual consistency? If both liberals and conservatives can legitimately claim him as an ally, may we not infer that he simply vacillated -- couldn't make up his mind where he stood? Though misguided, the question is plausible enough to require an answer. And it can be answered in a way that not only vindicates Newman's consistency but also illuminates his educational ideal.

The terms "liberal" and "conservative" are, of course, far too vague, capacious, and flexible to serve as the criteria for determining consistency. But even if they designated something more definite, the same point would apply to them that Newman applied to the "leading ideas" of "scientific men" -- whatever truth such ideas embody, it is not the whole truth; they must always be "compared with other truths." Indeed, the capacity to compare, contrast, and juxtapose ideas, to view them from different perspectives, is the distinguishing mark of that "philosophical habit of mind" which Newman holds out as the beau ideal of liberal education. It is the mark of the mind "which has learned to leaven the dense mass of facts ... with the elastic force of reason"; which "cannot be partial, cannot be exclusive, cannot be impetuous," but which has attained a "clear, calm, accurate vision and comprehension of all things, as far as the finite mind can embrace them, each in its place, and each with its own characteristics upon it."

Possessed himself of this balanced and comprehensive vision, Newman could never be doctrinaire about anything, least of all religion. On the contrary, he understood that Catholic doctrine was in reality an ensemble "of separate propositions, each of which, if maintained to the exclusion of the rest, is a heresy. From this it followed that circumstance had a great deal to do with what aspect of Catholic teaching one ought to stress. Under certain conditions, vindicating papal authority might take priority; in another set of circumstances, defending the claims of individual conscience could be the need of the hour

This consideration in itself suffices to explain what might appear to be inconsistencies in Newman's stance -- especially when we recall that his writings spar a half-century of rapid and far reaching change. But there is more, for Newman realized that sincere and intelligent Christian believers would disagree about what a given situation required, and he regarded the resulting controversy as natural, necessary, and beneficial. Speaking precisely of the "awful, never-dying duel" between authority and "private judgment" within the Catholic Church, he did not hesitate to call it "warfare" and to pronounce it "necessary for the very life of religion." Taking into account this conflict theory of religious truth, as we may call it, along with Newman's appreciation for the multifaceted nature of religious truth and the role of circumstance in determining priorities, and remembering that most of his writings were, as he himself attested, responses to specific occasions -- taking all this into account, need we wonder that at different times he stressed different points, or need we be perplexed that both liberals and conservative lay claim to his heritage?

But none of this was merely opportunistic. For just as Newman discerned a "continuity of principles" underlying the changes by which Christian doctrine "developed," we can be confident that an analogous kind of principle underlay any outward difference in the positions he took at one time and another. To say what those principles were, and to speculate on how our grasping them would help us to deal with the problems of our own time, would require another lecture -- and a different lecturer! Let me conclude this one by stating my firm belief our efforts to identify and apply those principles would be amply repaid and that it would help us greatly in doing so if we could attain the philosophical habit of mind Newman describes in *The Idea of a University*.

Seton Hall University - 400 South Orange Avenue, South Orange, NJ 07079 :: 973.761.9000  
For questions or comments, please contact the Webmaster - [webmaster@shu.edu](mailto:webmaster@shu.edu)