

“Newman and the Renewal of Catholic Identity in Higher Education”

Address to the Portsmouth Institute Conference “NEWMAN AND THE INTELLECTUAL TRADITION”

Patrick J. Reilly
President, The Cardinal Newman Society
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Earlier this year, researchers at Georgetown University released a study that analyzed survey data collected by the Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA.

What is unique about the UCLA survey is that students are asked questions upon entering college as freshmen, and then again prior to graduation.

This reveals how students have changed over four years of a college education, and is the best indication we have as to how the college experience impacts young adults.

With regard to Catholic students at Catholic colleges and universities (in this study, mostly the larger Catholic universities):

- 16 percent more pro-life . . . 31 percent more pro-abortion
- 16 percent traditional marriage . . . 39 percent same-sex marriage
- 12 percent leave the Catholic faith while attending a Catholic college
- Regression analysis found no significant difference between impact of choosing Catholic college vs. secular/state institution

In 2008, The Cardinal Newman Society surveyed current students of Catholic colleges and recent graduates within the last 10 years.

- Nearly 1 in 5 respondents knew another student who had or paid for an abortion
- 46% of current and recent students – and 50% of females – said they engaged in sex outside of marriage
- 60% agreed strongly or somewhat that abortion should be legal
- 57% agreed strongly or somewhat that same-sex “marriage” should be legal

- 54% of respondents said that their experience of attending a Catholic college or university had no effect on their support for the teachings of the Catholic Church

Now both of these surveys focused heavily on student behavior and student views on hot-button issues, but there is plenty of other evidence of an IDENTITY CRISIS in Catholic higher education

- Problems:
 - Courses – fragmented, less rigorous in thought
 - Faculty hiring
 - lay trustees
 - theological dissent
 - collapse of campus life, Vagina Monologues
- So what is the point of having Catholic colleges and universities?
 - If student behavior and campus life are similar?
 - If students are being pulled away from the Faith rather than toward it?
 - If the coursework and knowledge upon graduation is similar to what can be found elsewhere?
- *Money* magazine: "After adjusting for financial aid, the amount families pay for college has skyrocketed 439 percent since 1982"
 - Why pay for college education?
 - Why starve to get a liberal arts degree?
- Americans are increasingly uncertain as to the purpose of Catholic higher education – and higher education generally

- Career training (more resources elsewhere)
- Civic responsibility (better state function?)
- Democratization (but more diversity, less cost elsewhere)
- Catholic spirituality (but Newman centers)

NEWMAN'S IDEA OF A UNIVERSITY

- In fact, the argument for Catholic higher education has been around for more than 150 years
- It was 1852 when John Henry Newman delivered his series of lectures upon the founding of the Catholic University of Ireland, and those lectures were later compiled into one of the most celebrated (albeit widely misunderstood) works in Western culture: *The Idea of a University*
- I say “misunderstood” – or perhaps even deliberately distorted in some instances – because Newman is widely read and perceived in university circles to be a champion of the liberal arts, as it is commonly defined today and as it is studied in both secular and religious institutions, and largely irrelevant to matters of students’ social, moral and spiritual development both inside and outside the classroom
- In fact, I intend briefly to make the following arguments, which are contrary to some of the assumptions about Newman, but are really not so difficult to make drawing directly from Newman’s writings:
 - First, that Newman’s *Idea of a University* cannot be adequately accommodated to the secular institution, which in fact Newman regarded to be something other than a true university
 - Second, that the fact of a secular or even a Catholic university’s allowance for the study of religion and Divine Revelation comes closer but still does not, by itself, fulfill Newman’s definition of a University
 - Third, that Newman’s embrace of the liberal arts is quite different from what is today valued as a liberal arts core or program, at least in its most common form

- Fourth, that the contemporary university's negligence with regard to students' social, moral and spiritual development is entirely opposite to what Newman intended – and in fact, corrupts the integrity of the university and produces results which Newman would have abhorred.
- Fifth, that Newman greatly favored intellectually qualified laymen for faculty positions – but not professors who would undermine the University's commitment to Catholic teaching.

My first argument: that Newman's *Idea of a University* cannot be adequately accommodated to the secular institution, which in fact Newman regarded to be something other than a true university.

- The Catholic University of Ireland, which Newman was selected to lead, was a direct response to the Irish government's decision to establish three Queen's Colleges around Ireland that were entirely secular, and would be joined into a single university
- Many of the arguments for today's secular university were made then:
 - Necessary to serve an increasingly diverse population of both Protestants and Catholics
 - Able to provide an equal education – just without religion, which was increasingly viewed as a private affair and not the stuff of serious education
- Newman would have none of it
 - Calling the secular university “an intellectual absurdity,” he laid down the following syllogism:
 - “A University, I should lay down, by its very name professes to teach universal knowledge: Theology is surely a branch of knowledge: how then is it possible for it to profess all branches of knowledge, and yet to exclude from the subjects of its teaching one which, to say the least, is as important and as large as any of them?”
 - “If in a certain University, so called, the subject of Religion is excluded, one of two conclusions is inevitable – either, on the one hand, that the province of Religion is very barren of real knowledge, or, on the other

hand, that in such University one special and important branch of knowledge is omitted."

- Thus we come to understand what Newman posits in the opening sentences of his Preface to *The Idea of a University*: That while the definition of a University as "a place of teaching universal knowledge" does not immediately suggest to the secular mind a moral purpose or even the consideration of moral truths and Divine Revelation, Newman explains:
- "Such is a University in its *essence*, and independently of its relation to the Church. But, practically speaking, it cannot fulfill its object duly, such as I have described it, without the Church's assistance; or, to use the theological term, the Church is necessary for its *integrity*."
- Consider this from a historical perspective: There is nothing about the essence of a University that defines it as an explicitly Christian apostolate, such that a school of universal knowledge could not have been possible in pre-Christian times
- But today the Divine Revelation of the Judeo-Christian tradition is essential Truth which cannot simply be discarded by an authentic University
- Therefore, Newman goes so far as to argue that a secular University "cannot be what it professes, if there be a God. I do not wish to declaim; but, by the very force of the terms, it is very plain, that a Divine Being and a University so circumstanced cannot co-exist."
- Now Newman was no advocate for Universities that mimic seminaries, focused on preparing students for religious ministry – he was no more in support of that, than he supported Universities reduced to career factories
- The University, he argued, "is a place of teaching universal knowledge. This implies that its object is... intellectual, not moral"
- This has misled many scholars to claim that Newman in fact champions a sort of liberal arts education that could fit a secular university as well as a Catholic university

- But in fact Newman insisted that while the University's primary purpose is intellectual and serves all humanity, the Church and its Theology are still integral to the University
- By teaching "universal knowledge," Newman simply meant that while there are many branches of knowledge, each with its own methods of attaining knowledge (by observation, scientific method, intuition and revelation), none alone offers a complete understanding of Truth
- Even Theology, which has importance in relation to every other discipline because it is the science of God, by Whom all things are made and have meaning, offers knowledge only of Divine Revelation but not what we observe and feel according to human experience
- Newman believed that the real contribution of the University is to bring together scholars of a wide variety of disciplines, so that students can be taught to reflect upon every task or question posed to mankind by drawing upon every sort of knowledge, and not becoming less human by limiting oneself to the scientific perspective, or the popular perspective of the age
- At a Catholic university, this is accomplished while embracing the insights of Revelation – Newman wrote that graduates must be trained "to the use of the gifts of nature in the sunlight of divine grace and revealed truth" – or, as Pope John Paul II explained it in the apostolic constitution *Ex corde Ecclesiae*, "Catholicism is vitally present and operative"

Second, that the fact of a secular or even a Catholic university's allowance for the study of religion and Divine Revelation comes closer but still does not, by itself, fulfill Newman's definition of a University

- According to Newman, not only should the University include Catholic Theology, but Theology should be allowed to dialogue with other disciplines, which in turn should draw upon its insights and ethical implications
- But if Theology is to be free of such exclusion, it must be appreciated for its contributions and relevancy to other disciplines – indeed, a relevancy that is much broader than other disciplines

- Admit a God, and you introduce among the subjects of your knowledge, a fact encompassing, closing in upon, absorbing, every other fact conceivable.
- The intersection of religious knowledge with other disciplines may be overt, as in discussions of ethics in medicine, law or business; but it can also be subtle, as in a discussion about good works of literature:
 - Obscurities of thought, difficulties in philosophy, perplexities of faith, are confidentially brought out, sifted, and solved; and a pagan poet or theorist may thus become the occasion of Christian advancement.
- In addition to the positive contributions of Theology in dialogue with other disciplines, a properly understood academic freedom permits Theology to help prevent extreme and unfounded claims by other disciplines
 - This exorbitance is sure to take place, almost from necessity of the case, if Theology be not present to defend its own boundaries and to hinder the encroachment. The human mind cannot keep from speculating and systematizing; and if Theology is not allowed to occupy its own territory, adjacent sciences, nay, sciences which are quite foreign to Theology, will take possession of it.
- In his discourse “A Form of Infidelity of the Day,” Newman warns that the enemies of Faith would be wise to give Theology its place in the University, but then to marginalize and simply ignore it
 - Should they profess themselves the antagonists of theology, and engage in argumentative exercises with theologians? ...Nothing, they will say to themselves, do religious men desire so ardently, nothing would so surely advance the cause of Religion, as Controversy. ...Turning, then to the Universities of England, they will pronounce that the true policy to be observed there would be simply to let the schools of Theology alone. ... Not to interfere with Theology, not to raise a little finger against it, is the only means of superseding it. ...Leave its teachers to themselves; merely aim at the introduction of other studies, which, while they have the accidental charm of a novelty, possess a surpassing interest, richness, and practical value of their own. Get possession of these studies, and appropriate them, and monopolize the use of them, to

the exclusion of the other votaries of religion. Take it for granted, and protest, for the future, that Religion has nothing to do with the studies to which I am alluding, nor those studies with Religion. Exclaim and cry out, if the Catholic Church presumes herself to handle what you mean to use as a weapon against her.

- Prophetic, isn't it?
- This is not at all unlike the treatment of faithful Catholic Theology in many of our contemporary Catholic universities, such that it may be tolerated but not celebrated, and provokes not dialogue but embarrassment that such a thing would exist at a serious university
- Another point about the insufficiency of simply permitting the presence of a Theology chair or department: a Catholic University's integrity also depends on accepting the authority of the Church's Magisterium with regard to faith, morals and the university's Catholic identity
- In the 1967 Land O'Lakes Statement, American Catholic university leaders declared independence from "authority of whatever kind, lay or clerical"
- Although the intent was not to diminish the universities' Catholic identity, the divorce from the bishops meant that there was no oversight to ensure fidelity in theology instruction and consistency in university policies and programs - and today the Land O'Lakes Statement is known as the watershed moment that launched the rapid secularization of most Catholic colleges and universities in the United States
- Again, Newman is prophetic:
 - I say then, that, even though the case could be so that the whole system of Catholicism was recognized and professed, without the direct presence of the Church, still this would not at once make such a University a Catholic Institution, nor be sufficient to secure the due weight of religious considerations in its philosophical studies. For it may easily happen that a particular bias or drift may

characterize an Institution, which no rules can reach, nor officers remedy, nor professions or promises counteract.

- As much as Newman values knowledge for its own sake, he also realizes the dangers inherent in the reliance on partial knowledge, and in fact we can grow in our knowledge of God but never have the fullness of Truth in this world -- which is why the involvement of the Church in the University is necessary to maintain its integrity and prevent theological error.
 - Truth has two attributes – beauty and power; and while Useful Knowledge is the possession of truth as powerful, Liberal Knowledge is the apprehension of it as beautiful.
 - Pursue it, either as beauty or as power, to its furthest extent and its true limit, and you are led by either road to the Eternal and Infinite, to the intimations of conscience and the announcements of the Church. Satisfy yourself with what is only visibly or intelligibly excellent, as you are likely to do, and you will make present utility and natural beauty the practical test of truth, and the sufficient object of the intellect.
 - It is not that you will at once reject Catholicism, but you will measure and proportion it by an earthly standard. You will throw its highest and most momentous disclosures into the background, you will deny its principles, explain away its doctrines, rearrange its precepts, and make light of its practices, even while you profess it.
- The Church's role in higher education is not to restrict but to maintain integrity:
 - Her principle is one and the same throughout: not to prohibit truth of any kind, but to see that no doctrines pass under the name of Truth but those which claim it rightly.

Third, that Newman's embrace of the liberal arts is quite different from what is today valued as a liberal arts core or program, at least in its most common form

- the so-called liberal arts core programs required by most American colleges and universities today is not at all what Newman proposed
- It is not simply a matter of dabbling in a series of unrelated liberal arts courses before getting to the specialized work of career preparation
- Unlike the modern canon of liberal arts, which is often prescribed without any clear purpose, Newman was not very concerned about the subjects studied, except that there be an emphasis on 1) learning how to think and organize knowledge, which tends to favor subjects like logic and philosophy and science; and 2) learning how to interrelate knowledge come to a fuller understanding of Truth, which favors subjects like Theology and (again) philosophy and ethics
- Newman encouraged study of the Classics, not as history, but as "the most robust and invigorating discipline for the unformed mind"
- So the result then, is not the specialist worker or even the admired gentleman, but graduates who display "the force, the steadiness, the comprehensiveness and the versatility of intellect, the command over our own powers, the instinctive just estimate of things as they pass before us" – and by these skills, with the aid of conscience that is well-formed in fidelity to Catholic teaching, the graduate becomes a better Catholic able to serve God in this world

Fourth, that the contemporary university's negligence with regard to students' social, moral and spiritual development is entirely opposite to what Newman intended

- Earlier I referenced Newman's use of the terms *essence* and *integrity* in helping to explain how the intellectual purpose of the university (its *essence*), which in itself is not explicitly religious, loses its *integrity* if it excludes due consideration of the truths that are revealed by God but not accessible by observation or reason.
- But if a Catholic university has no strictly moral purpose, as Newman writes, and is focused on the intellectual task of teaching and relating

knowledge, what of the concerns I noted at the outset in today's Catholic colleges and universities – the sexual activity and abortions, the spiritual decline, campus performances of *The Vagina Monologues*?

- Are these not contrary to the mission of a Catholic university, as Catholic?
- Many Catholic university leaders today seem to agree that providing for classroom learning and research is their core responsibility -- with at least as much attention to the interests and needs of professors as to the students – and providing residence halls and campus activities is largely an administrative necessity to meet the demands of students who want to live and socialize away from home
- The fact that campus life is largely an administrative concern is immediately evident in the disengagement of faculty and college leaders from nearly everything that occurs in campus life, often with a shocking lack of awareness of student behaviors and interests.
- That was not at all Newman's intent.
- Newman's intellectual emphasis when defining the *essence* of the University is best understood in the context of Oxford University, which was Newman's model for the Catholic University of Ireland, with a few key adjustments
- At Oxford and at the University of Ireland, multiple residential Colleges were incorporated into a larger University, and although the Colleges were subject to the oversight of the University, they were financially independent and the functions of the College and University were distinct
- Today in America we use the terms "college" and "university" differently, to indicate whether or not advanced degrees are offered.
- It was in Newman's Colleges -which he also called "Houses" – where communities of students developed together morally, spiritually and intellectually, under the close guidance of Tutors
- The Houses, according to Newman, existed "for the formation of character, intellectual and moral, for the cultivation of the mind, for the improvement of the individual, for the study of literature, for the classics,

and those rudimental sciences which strengthen and sharpen the intellect.”

- Newman told the Irish bishops that he considered the discipline of students “one of the most important [matters] we have to consider,” and later he insisted that the same roof must “contain both the intellectual and moral discipline”
- That discipline was a matter for the House rectors and tutors:
 - A University residence, then, is in fact a period of training interposed between boyhood and manhood, and one of its special offices is to introduce and to launch the young man into the world. ... If this be so, then is it entrusted with an office as momentous as it is special ; for nothing is more perilous to the soul than the sudden transition from restraint to liberty.¹
- But Newman greatly respected the young man’s need for independence, and although his University would have had rules of conduct and even dress that are found at precious few universities today, he knew that young adults would resist rules and described the “formal discipline of a University” as therefore “defective”²
- Instead he relied heavily on “personal experience” with professors and House rectors and tutors to preserve the “integrity” of the University³
- He wanted the Houses to be small, noting that:
 - Personal influence requires personal acquaintance, and the minute labour of a discretionary rule is too fatiguing to be exercised on a large number⁴
- Newman describes the life of the Houses as rather strictly regimented by today’s standards, and resembling somewhat the ordered intellectual and spiritual life of the Oratory:

¹ John Henry Newman, *My Campaign in Ireland* (Aberdeen: A. King, 1896), 36.

² John Henry Newman, *My Campaign in Ireland* (Aberdeen: A. King, 1896), 38.

³ John Henry Newman, *My Campaign in Ireland* (Aberdeen: A. King, 1896), 39.

⁴ John Henry Newman, *My Campaign in Ireland* (Aberdeen: A. King, 1896), 39.

- Each House has its chapel and common table. The following is the course of a student's day: attendance at Mass at 8 a.m.; breakfast; attendance at Lectures from 9 to 2; dinner at 5; presence indoors by a fixed hour in the evening, according to the season.⁵
- In addition to the Houses, Newman cultivated student behavior and habits in other ways, including celebrating the Sacraments of "confession" and the Mass in the University Church, which was distinctly Catholic and deliberately built at the center of the University, and where students were drawn to University Sermons by "good preachers"

Fifth, that Newman greatly favored intellectually qualified laymen for faculty positions – but not professors who would undermine the University's commitment to Catholic teaching.

- Despite the clericalism that was prevalent in Ireland at the time, Newman was adamant about hiring lay professors and involving them in the governance of the University – a point of serious disagreement with Dublin's Archbishop Paul Cullen, who had invited Newman to serve as chancellor.
- Newman had his way with the faculty, who included five priests and 27 laymen.⁶
- Newman required that all professors be Catholic, although primarily laymen, and that professors, rectors and tutors must be good examples of high Christian morals
- As for the leadership of the University, Newman failed to convince the Irish bishops that professors should share in the governance
- A couple decades later, in a letter to an officer of the University, Newman lamented the Irish bishops' continued reticence about lay cooperation with clergy in managing the institution, so that, "as from a common ground, they may act in union upon an age which is running headlong into infidelity."⁷

⁵ John Henry Newman, *My Campaign in Ireland* (Aberdeen: A. King, 1896), 33.

⁶ Charles S. Dessain, *John Henry Newman* (London: Nelson, 1966), 107.

⁷ Charles S. Dessain and Thomas Gornall, S.J., eds., *The Letters and Diaries of John Henry Newman*, XXVI (London: Clarendon Press, 1974), 394.

- The consequence of clericalism, Newman believed, was serious:
 - As far as I can see, there are ecclesiastics all over Europe, whose policy is to keep the laity at arms-length; and hence the laity have been disgusted and become infidel, and only two parties exist, both ultras in opposite directions. I came away from Ireland with the distressing fear, that in that Catholic country, in like manner, there was to be an antagonism, as time went on, between the hierarchy and the educated classes.⁸

CONCLUSION

- I spoke at the outset of the fact that Newman's *Idea of a University* and related writings have been widely misunderstood, and even deliberately distorted
- The extent to which this has occurred is astonishing
- In a study of the various published editions of Newman's *Idea of a University* since his death, Todd Ream of Indiana Wesleyan University finds that several 20th-century versions of *The Idea of a University* omit or abridge Newman's discourses most directly related to Catholic education
- For instance, in the 1931 Cambridge University edition, the editor May Yardley omits the discourses titled "Theology a Branch of Knowledge," "Bearing on Theology on Other Branches of Knowledge," and "Bearing of Other Branches of Knowledge on Theology;" and also extracts only portions of the critically important "Duties of the Church Towards Knowledge" and "Knowledge Viewed in Relations to Religious Duty."
- In the introduction to Cambridge edition, Yardley then writes, "The account of the peculiar function of the Catholic University and the relationship between the Church and learning has rather an historical than an absolute value for us."⁹
- In a 1947 edition, editor Charles Frederick Harrold excluded two discourses on "Elementary Studies" and "University Preaching," citing "their lack of relevancy for our time"

⁸ Charles S. Dessain and Thomas Gornall, S.J., eds., *The Letters and Diaries of John Henry Newman*, XXVI (London: Clarendon Press, 1974), 393-94.

⁹ May Yardley, "Introduction," *Select Discourses from The Idea of a University* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University, 1931), xxx.

- His introduction claimed that “Newman’s notion of a university education is mainly limited to secular discipline,” and “The Formation of the soul and character [Newman] would leave to the home and to the Church.”
- In fact, what confounds so many about Newman’s *Idea of a University* is his complete certainty that the task of education ultimately leads one to the fount of Truth, the Creator, and therefore has the same object as Theology in each of the ways it pursues knowledge
- In his very first sermon in his University Church in 1856, Newman recalled mankind’s creation when by grace all the human faculties acted “in common towards one end”
- Because of the Fall of Adam and Eve, Newman argued, the student comes to the University with “all these separate powers warring in his own breast—appetite, passion, secular ambition, intellect, and conscience, and trying severally to get possession of him”
 - Here, then, I conceive, is the object of the Holy See and the Catholic Church in setting up Universities; it is to reunite things which were in the beginning joined together by God, and have been put asunder by man.
- And so it should be no surprise that Newman viewed his role as rector of a Catholic university, above all, as a pastoral duty. Prior to assuming this University role, he wrote in his Journal this prayer for his students:
 - May I engage in them, remembering that I am a minister of Christ... remembering the worth of souls and that I shall have to answer for the opportunities given me of benefitting those who are under my care.
- It is this sort of educator, this sort of education, that offers the promise of improving and correcting a society that neglects Truth and is amused by Faith
- Meanwhile, we are confronted by the unique challenge of a culture and academia that is, as Newman predicts in his sermon “The Infidelity of the Future”, “simply irreligious”

- The hostility toward the Faithful appears to be growing, and the threats to the religious freedom of Catholic colleges and universities are also growing, whether in mandates to provide insurance coverage for birth control for both students and faculty, or the federal takeover of the student loan program, or current legislation before Congress that would force Catholic colleges to hire and give benefits to same-sex couples

- As Newman wrote:
 - I think that the trials which lie before us are such as would appall and make dizzy even such courageous hearts as St. Athanasius, St. Gregory I, or St. Gregory VII. And they would confess that, dark as the prospect of their own day was to them severally, ours has a darkness different in kind from any that has been before it.

- Nevertheless, we know how the battle ends

- We look with hope to Newman's beatification and eventual canonization, knowing that Newman can be a powerful patron for the renewal of Catholic education and the whole Church

- And with the encouragement and leadership of Pope John Paul II and now Pope Benedict XVI, many American bishops, priests and scholars together with The Cardinal Newman Society are compelled to simply forge ahead with the project that Newman began 150 years ago with these hopeful words:
 - "...[T]his is our hour, whatever be its duration, the hour for great hopes, great schemes, great efforts, great beginnings... to recommence the age of Universities."