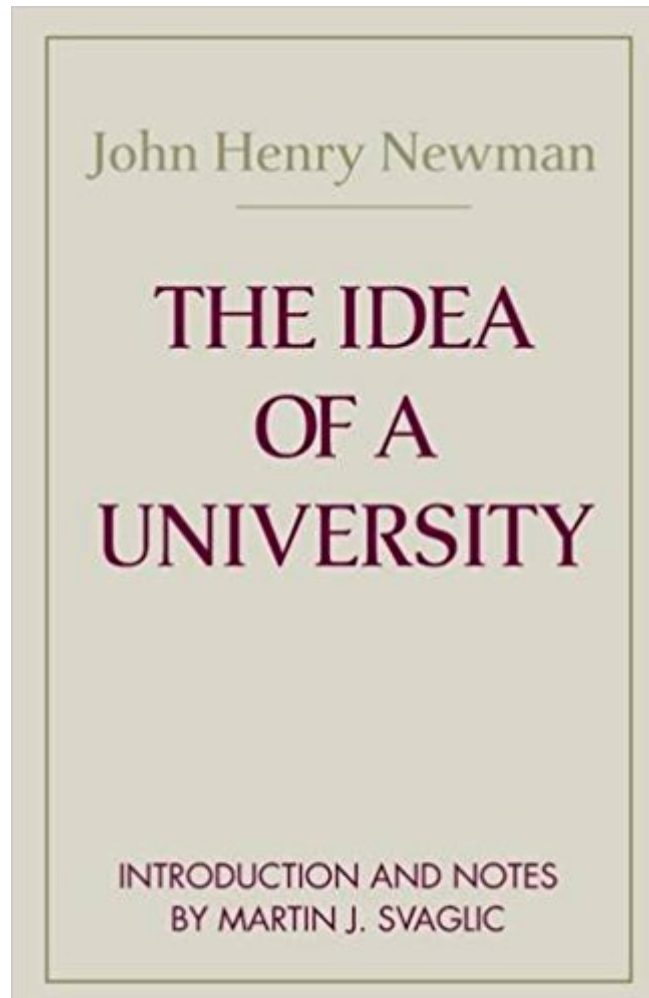




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# The Idea Of A University (Notre Dame Series In The Great Books)



## Synopsis

"The Idea of a University [is an] eloquent defense of a liberal education which is perhaps the most timeless of all [Newman's] books and certainly the one most intellectually accessible to readers of every religious faith and of none. . . . [O]nly one who has read The Idea of a University in its entirety, especially the nine discourses, can hope to understand why its reputation is so high: why the first reading of this book has been called an 'epoch' in the life of a college man; why Walter Pater thought it 'the perfect handling of a theory'; why the historian G. M. Young has ranked it with Aristotle's Ethics among the most valuable of all works on the aim of Education; or why Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch told his students at Cambridge that 'of all the books written in these hundred years there is perhaps none you can more profitably thumb and ponder.'" -from the introduction by Martin J. Svaglic

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This excellent new edition of The Idea of a University, especially intended for students, contains a first-rate introduction, appropriately by Don Briel, the founder of the Catholic Studies Program which has become the model for programs around the world. — Ian Ker, Senior Research Fellow, Blackfriars Hall, Oxford University — "At a time when intellectuals and the cultured class felt a growing freedom to reject faith as unfounded, or relegate it to the realm of imagination and sentiment, Newman offered an elegant defense of the place of religious truth in the

University—it was not just as one discipline among many, but the condition of general knowledge. Today Newman's Idea of a University still offers a compelling vision of what a Catholic university might offer in an increasingly secular age.

~John Garvey, President, the Catholic University of America

“John Henry Newman's classic reflection on university life is even more important today than when he wrote it, given the intellectual, social, and spiritual degradations into which the modern multiversity has fallen. A close reading of Newman, in this marvelous new edition, may help spark the reform that American high education desperately needs.”

~George Weigel, Distinguished Senior Fellow, Ethics and Public Policy Center, Washington, DC

“A classic is a work of enduring relevance. There is arguably no work of greater ongoing importance for the self-understanding of contemporary colleges and universities—especially Catholic colleges and universities—than John Henry Newman's classic The Idea of a University. Don Briel and Christopher Blum have contributed to a splendid new study edition...to situate and unlock this extraordinary work for a twenty-first century readership. This edition is of great timeliness and special urgency in view of the present crisis of higher education.”

~Reinhard Huetter, Visiting Professor, School of Theology and Religious Studies, the Catholic University of America, and Professor of Christian Theology, Divinity School of Duke University

“Among the great Christian thinkers, Newman remains the most neglected and in many ways the most needed for our times. In The Idea of a University, Newman draws together three points (among others): education is for the person-to-person formation of the mind rather than simply for information; education requires some introduction to the full scope of human knowledge in order for any one field of thought to flourish; and education in the lecture halls cannot be disjoined from what goes on in the residential halls. Reflection on each point shows the need for the Church's presence as a guard against the corrosive influence of pride and the passions--and thus the urgent need for Catholic universities. But reflection also shows that most Catholic universities today are distancing themselves from each point. Rather than despairing, read Newman's book illumined by the brilliant essays of Briel and Blum, and arm oneself with the insights needed for the renewal of true education.”

~Matthew Levering, James N. and Mary D. Perry, Jr., Chair of Theology, Mundelein Seminary

--This text refers to an alternate Paperback edition.

The issues that John Henry Newman raised--the place of religion and moral values in the university setting, the competing claims of liberal and professional education, the character of the academic community, the cultural role of literature, the relation of religion and science--have provoked

discussion from Newman's time to our own. --This text refers to an alternate Paperback edition.

Great, great book. The ideas that Newman discusses have definitely shaped our universities and need to continue to shape our universities. This is a classic book for those asking, "How should one do education?"

Prior to reading this tasty work I had no idea Cardinal Newman was so prescient, such a brilliant intellect. As one reads, one has a new appreciation for the cultural drift that has harmed our society.

When John Henry Newman gave his series of lectures to a series of audiences at Dublin University, he was setting out his view as to what a Liberal education should be. Those who sought such an education should see themselves as gentlemen intellectuals who might seek a specific career only after they achieved their University degree. For those who wished a specific trade or vocation, there were plenty of schools for that--but Newman's University would not be one of them. In his *The Idea of a University*, he sets out his vision of both the student and the school that could churn out those who loved knowledge for its own sake. In short, such graduates would be multiple copies of himself. Newman anticipates the objections of future generations of parents of students who wish to study the liberal arts. First, he suggests that the very nature of any university ought to foster the pursuit of any legitimate field of study, liberal arts or otherwise. Second, the notion of "liberal" is one that has achieved an unfortunate connotation of elite inutility. What is liberal about the mind and soul is that it inculcates a set of values that far transcends that which a trade might offer. Rather than focusing one's efforts on the mere acquisition of things material, which do nothing to make one a better person by their mere presence, liberal arts change the man within and make him the better for that. Third, the ardent study of liberal arts is a subset of the general pursuit of Knowledge, which is an end worthwhile in itself. Fourth, those who study liberal arts tend to think of their school as a place where they receive education rather than instruction. The former implies that minds are opened to the infinite space of all that the human mind may accomplish while the latter closes those minds to admit only tricks and devices that lead to the growth of money and material things, neither of which makes the man the better by their mere possession. Finally, since the stated aim of a liberal education is the sheer pleasure that results, it follows that a course of instruction that leads to a trade must also lead to things that relate to that trade rather than to any sense of inner contentment that is concomitant with liberal education. For those critics of a liberal education who carp that such an education has not transformed its graduates into paragons of moral virtue, Newman would

respond that such a transformation--however desirable--was never a goal of liberal studies in the first place. Just as liberal studies is not intended to turn out cads and bounders neither is it at the other end of moral spectrum obliged to create a higher level of human being. Education, to John Henry Newman, was a term that ought to mean more than a passive acceptance of facts, data, and statistics. He had a particular horror at the thought of a society whose knowledge base consisted exclusively of those whose learning was a function of how rapidly they could disgorge on command a flow of previously memorized data bits. There was nothing liberal in the parroting of such data that would mean as much to Newman as a real parrot might intuit from its own squawking. For Newman to distinguish between the mere growth of accumulated facts that pass for knowledge and the rational judgment of those facts that might lead to true wisdom he had to identify a failing that was as common in his day as it most surely is in ours--the preponderance of pseudo-scholars who impress mightily with the bulk of their knowledge but fail to apply that knowledge to weighing standards that truly equate to revealed knowledge. As a cleric seeking to convince both fellow clerics and the layman of the need to continually evaluate a theology that he was sure needed frequent questioning, he himself had to resort to perpetual self-reflection based on what he thought he knew and what he only suspected he did. The difference between the one and the other was the difference between a great thinker like Aristotle expounding on the weighty issues of being human and a human-parrot endlessly re-echoing a flood of facts that began nowhere and ended up nowhere. It fell to religion to provide the initial impetus to bulwark the learner not to assume that one regurgitated data bit equated to a revealed sanctioned Holy Truth. Thus, the process of looking inward for moral centering must accompany an outward transformation of useless fact to useful wisdom. There were no computers present in his day, but had there been, Newman would have viewed a pseudo-scholar who could absorb and disgorge facts as no more than a walking mechanical contrivance, both of which he would deem as equally soulless. Newman could distinguish between the aggregation of facts as knowledge (lower case k) and the proper use of those facts as revealed Knowledge (upper case). Wisdom consisted in the ability of the human mind to discern pattern from the seeming chaos of unconnected bits and pieces. The pseudo-scholar could disgorge a constant flow of unrelated data but the Great Thinker could take that flow and connect the dots to produce words and ideas that in their utility stand for heavenly-inspired wisdom. The knowledge that John Henry Newman deemed vital to the continuity of both the Catholic Church and England itself had to be a function of the training of all those who desired to study higher education. Newman abhorred the rote memorization mode of learning so popular in his time. In his essays that comprise *The Idea of a University*, Newman describes the ideal candidate for

entrance into a school such as the one to which he had just been appointed as rector. This candidate would be taught by professors who acknowledge that all learning is worthwhile. The learning that constitutes liberal education should have such a high value that it ought to need no defense to justify its existence. Yet the very anti-liberal bias of Newman's day demanded that both student and professor be able to provide just such a defense on demand. The end of knowledge, Newman relentlessly urged, must be its own end. Having said that, Newman urged that knowledge itself required further definition. As learning enters the skulls of the students, each new fact needed more than just a slotted space in a synaptic pathway. That student had the obligation to review that knowledge to determine whether it was worthy of retention. This review presupposed that a series of standards had to be learned as well. Learning would then be seen as multi-directional. Facts flow inward toward the brain, are stored for future use, are weighed against those standards, and are judged accordingly whether they are fit for further use. Passivity in learning as a pedagogical tool is tossed onto the junk heap of discarded theories. One who has passed through the demanding curriculum of a liberal education is one who is, in every sense of the word, "educated," and can prove his use to the doubting Lockes of the world simply by excelling in all phases of life, work, and business.

Newman is at his best when he describes the development of the intellect at a university as analogous to the training of the body by athletes. The book is a well-deserved classic in this description of the use of a liberal arts education. Readers interested in insights into the structure of a modern university are going to be somewhat disappointed as these parts of the book are more dated. Not trained in the modern sciences, Newman's description of their interaction with the humanities also suffers and is not of perennial importance. Given that elements do not have much interest except to scholars of the 19th century, the book is still highly recommended as a guide to what a liberal arts education and an adult intellect should be like.

This is a review of the NEW edition of *Idea of a University* (from Cluny Media). First, it is the same text as found in the Notre Dame Press edition from the 1980s. But really, it's the only edition that matters at this point! I mean, you can't beat the price for what you're getting. The unabridged text of *Idea* (from the 1873 printing) and fantastic new material. The introduction and afterword from Drs. Briel and Blum really do set this edition apart for me. Briel cleared up a major confusion for me about the focus of *Idea* not being the nature of the university but rather the nature of the educated mind. Blum does a terrific job of showing the contemporary relevance of Newman's thought, with

compelling material from Aquinas as well. Another nice thing about this new edition is that the supplementary reading list includes more recent books on Newman, including Ker's Biography of Newman from 2009, which is very helpful for research. Really, if you are going to have a copy of Idea of a University, it should be this one!

Very interesting in order to understand the Catholic point of view of the university by a great thinker. Although he speaks from his priesthood character, his opinions are useful for many non believers. The language was a little difficult for me (non native english speaker).

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