

## **“The Idea of the Catholic University in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century”**

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### **ABSTRACT:**

#### **Newmanian Idea or American Corporation? Revisiting the Catholic University Through Ignatian Eyes**

*Paul Monson, Sacred Heart Seminary and School of Theology*

In 2010, the U.S. Supreme Court infamously ruled that, in the words of one prominent politician, “corporations are people.” Within this corporatized culture, a growing number of scholars poignantly assert that American universities have become corporations in their own right. Students are now consumers of a professional product with an astronomical price tag, one that marginalizes the poor and exploits the adjunct. Does a similar reality haunt American Catholic higher education in the twenty-first century? Are Catholic universities shifting from communities to corporations? Has John Henry Newman’s “idea” become a nightmare, or has it proven to be mere fantasy in a postmodern, post-Christian world? In focusing on identity rather than purpose, American Catholics have left these pressing questions unanswered.

Addressing this lacuna, this paper appeals to Jesuit pedagogy for an antidote to the corporatization of American Catholic universities. It argues that the idea of formation, rather than education, marks the Catholic university’s distinctive contribution to American higher education. To make this case, the study recovers Ignatius of Loyola’s idea of the *cura personalis*, the “care of the whole person,” as found in his *Spiritual Exercises* (1548). It further pairs this concept with the *Ratio Studiorum* (1599), the foundational charter for Jesuit schools, particularly in its creative recourse to the humanities for proper Catholic education. These sixteenth-century trajectories illumine the essence of Newman’s nineteenth-century Idea of the University. Reexamined in its historical context, Newman’s “idea” is more than just an exaltation of the liberal arts for an aristocratic culture. Rather, through a Jesuit lens, Newman’s residential community of individualized, interpersonal mentorship emerges as the crux of his university model, one with perennial application. In other words, Newman shares Ignatius’s insight, tried and tested through the centuries, that a university community and its appreciation for the whole of knowledge rests on the foundation of individualized pedagogy and formation. For Newman, a Catholic university is “an Alma Mater, knowing her children one by one, not a foundry or a mint, or a treadmill” (*The Idea of a University*, Discourse 6,8). Or, in the thought of Ignatius, the Catholic university focuses not merely on the whole but rather the whole person. The Catholic student, in this sense, remains a person with her own distinct path of intellectual and human formation, not a customer to placate or a statistic for accreditation.

In recovering these Jesuit and Newmanian insights, the paper further advances an original threefold approach to twenty-first-century Catholic higher education. This approach, gleaned from professional experience in the classroom, hinges on (1) an interdisciplinary community in the pursuit of truth, (2) faculty mentorship (rather than “advising”) in the pursuit of the good, and (3) diversified individuality in the pursuit of beauty. In particular, faculty form an indispensable link between the university community and the individual student, disrupting the secular penchant for corporatization. Together these three pillars achieve comprehensive human formation rather than mere knowledge-based education. The study concludes with tangible examples for implementing such an approach.