



THE CATHOLIC CHAPLAIN IN THE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY

For most young people in the world, the opportunity to gain a higher education in colleges and universities is a rare privilege—restricted to the more affluent or at least to the more fortunate. In the United States such an opportunity is now considered a right and a practical necessity for success and security in later life.

In 1960 there were 16.2 million youths in our colleges and universities, 22% of all Americans in that age category. By a recent study this percentage of the student-age population is projected to 35 by 1985.

There are at this time 2,028 institutions of higher learning in the U. S. Of these, 303 are Catholic schools and 502 are under Protestant or Jewish sponsorship. That leaves 1,223 secular, or non religious-orientated, colleges and universities.

Catholics in the United States have accomplished an amazing feat in establishing their own educational system. The earliest schools in this country, including the colleges and universities, were Protestant in foundation and orientation. Even after the public, or government-supported,

schools were established they remained under this influence for nearly a century. Towards the end of the last century, following the directives of the Third Council of Baltimore, the Church in the United States proposed the ambitious ideal of "every Catholic student in a Catholic school."

At that time few of the country's young citizens went beyond an elementary education. Consequently every parish tried to establish its own parochial grade school, and most of them succeeded. As educational opportunities increased and our society prospered economically, the Church tried to keep apace with the establishment of secondary schools, colleges and universities.

The pace, however, was too rapid and the burden too great to expect Catholics to keep up a parallel school system. Today more Catholics are in public schools than in Church-sponsored schools. Twice as many Catholic students are now in other colleges and universities than those under Catholic auspices, and this ratio of enrollment will increase in the direction of the inexpensive, tax-supported institutions.

Yet the Church remains solicitous, concerned for the religious needs, pastoral and educational, of her children of all ages in all of the schools. For nearly a century, groups of Catholic students in secular colleges and universities have gathered together, under the direction of a chaplain, to integrate the life and thought of the Church into their academic careers. In 1893 at the University of Pennsylvania, such a group adopted John Henry Cardinal Newman as an appropriate patron. Ever since almost every Catholic student organization in these schools in the United States has called itself a "Newman Club" or "Newman Center."

Their progress in organization and effective Catholic action was at first slow. The first full-time chaplain was appointed in 1906 (at the University of Wisconsin). The first Catholic student chapel was erected, at the same university, in 1910. The first federation of Newman groups was organized on the eastern seaboard in 1915. It wasn't until 1938 that a National Newman Club Federation was established, and only in 1941 did this organization receive the official recognition of the Church by its incorporation into the Youth Department of the National Catholic Welfare Conference.

During the past few years this student apostolate has made remarkable progress. In 1950 a national Newman chaplains' association was founded. In 1952 a national office was set up in the National Catholic Welfare Conference building in Washington, D. C. In 1957 a national Newman alumni association was formed and in 1959 an association of faculty and staff

members. During that same year, the National Newman Foundation, designed to raise and distribute funds, was approved by the bishops of the country. Within the past decade the number of full-time chaplains and foundations has more than doubled.

In 1962 the most significant advances were made. Chaplains and Newman centers with formal educational programs were admitted as full members of the College and University section of the National Catholic Educational Association—indicating formal recognition of Newman work as an educational activity. In this same year, by the mandate of the American bishops, all six national Newman organizations were combined under the over-all title, "National Newman Apostolate." Thus the Church adopted an existing movement and declared it an official apostolic action of her own. The Newman Apostolate has been defined as "the work of the Church in the secular academic community." This indicates a much broader scope and far wider perspective than were originally envisioned by the founders of the movement.

Unlike his European counterpart, the American chaplain on the university campus is far more than a counsellor or a pastor or a scholar in sacred doctrine. He must be all of these and much more. For he is not merely a chaplain. In well-developed Newman foundations he is a director of an institution as many-faceted as a church and school and cultural center combined.

He heads an institution adjacent to the campus which may offer as many services as: liturgical functions, administration of the sacraments, retreats, counselling, classes and seminars, library facilities, study lounges, cafeteria, game rooms, social programs, apostolic formation and leadership training, choral practice, theatre and art appreciation, social welfare programs. And with all this, he must maintain close contacts with both the campus and civic communities. He usually is the principal fund-raiser, both for the erection and the maintenance of his foundation.

The American chaplain, therefore, works on a much larger scale than his confrere abroad. He may employ a Catholic Action cell technique but only as part of a broader program which reaches out to involve all, or as many as possible, of the Catholics on campus. He is more active than contemplative. In fact, he has precious little time for his own study. To refresh the chaplain intellectually, to help him to apply perennial principles to current academic issues, the National Association of Newman Chaplains, in cooperation with the Dominican priories at Dubuque, Iowa, and Providence, Rhode Island, sponsors institutes during the summer for the depth

study of critical scholastic problems. The Association also provides a training school for new chaplains each summer, financed by its own Foundation.

The majority of the 850 chaplains in American universities are part-time and lack facilities, at least adequate ones. The progress has been uneven. Rutgers University, for example, has no foundation and only a part-time chaplain. The University of Massachusetts, serving not many more Catholic students, recently dedicated a new million-dollar Newman center. At the University of New Mexico the Newman center comprises three buildings and is served by a staff of four chaplains as well as lay personnel.

To achieve the ambitious aims of the Newman Apostolate in the United States, more personnel is needed. There are not enough diocesan priests to go around and still provide for the special needs of a half million Catholic students on these campuses. Priests of religious communities are sharing in the work, principally Paulists, Dominicans and Benedictines (in that order of numerical strength); but they cannot close the ever-widening gap between need and provision. In a few isolated incidences Sisters are working in this apostolate and, in greater numbers, lay volunteers.

Formal and accredited programs of religious education are on the increase in Newman foundations. About fifty colleges and universities in the United States now allow credit for Catholic courses of study—either directly through the institution where such classes are taught, or indirectly by extension through a Catholic school. Especially significant among recent developments in this direction was a direct accreditation of courses taught by a Jesuit priest, paid by the university, at Western Michigan State last year—and next year's arrangement by Purdue University to accept the credits of courses, through Notre Dame University, taught by a Dominican priest at the Newman foundation and paid by that foundation.

The Catholic chaplain on the secular campus in the United States has a tremendous task to perform—to bring the Church to that academic community. He probably works harder, if he does his job, than any other priest in his area. He must attempt to provide all that the Church offers, through a number of established institutions, for the Catholics in his campus community—as well as engage in ecumenical action and academic contact to an extent unknown in any parish or Catholic school. He encounters innumerable obstacles and frustrations in trying to achieve these goals.

His work is seldom understood in its profundity and extent, its complexity and urgency, not only by the Catholic laity but sometimes by his own confreres in the clergy and his superiors in the hierarchy.

He himself often feels that he is stumbling in the dark, facing trees instead of the forest. He is constantly experimenting in new structural forms, new programs, new approaches—and sharing these with other chaplains as unsure and innovating as himself.

He is in a hostile environment, generally inimical to Christian faith, to its revealed truths and its absolute moral values. Superficially, if he is fortunate, he may enjoy a large measure of cooperation from the administration of the school he serves, the faculty he befriends, the students to whom he ministers. But no matter how sympathetically his efforts are received, the blunt fact remains that he is in the minority position—a witness to and teacher of the traditional Christian faith in a post-Christian, predominantly secular, society. He may welcome and be grateful for the desultory nod of recognition from the administrator, the occasional interest and respect of a faculty friend, the curious appraisal of an alien student of a lost generation, the obvious advance in Christian perfection in one of his faithful own—but the inevitable and unavoidable confrontation he must make is with the fact that he is, in the words of Cardinal Suhard, the modern-day sign of contradiction.

With the consequences of the defects of quantitative education in America today, he may champ at the intellectual bit, frustrated by truth in an age of popular ignorance—last year each American bought one-third of a book (and that includes the better-selling trash on the drug store paperback rack); his fellow-Americans during the past year spent 70 million dollars more for flowers than they did for books, ten times as much for tobacco, 26 times as much for liquor.

On the other hand, if he is in one of the better schools, more demanding in percentile superiority, he may be sadly aware of his own incompetence in the vigorous trading of ideas in the academic marketplace. An average seminary education does not equip him to engage in intellectual skirmishes with scholastic professionals or even well-rounded undergraduates of superior intelligence and with an extraordinary acquisition of varied items of knowledge.

He is too often left to "work things out" on his own. This includes the miraculous expectation of adequate funds and facilities and personnel to do the job expected of him—necessary and vital to the very survival of Christian culture in a secularistic milieu.

His weary, often bleary, eyes look up to the sublime ideal of his patron, John Henry Newman, who thus described the task of the Church in the secular academic community:

. . . it is to reunite things which were in the beginning joined together by God, and have been put asunder by men. Some persons will say that I am thinking of confining, distorting, and stunting the growth of the intellect by ecclesiastical supervision. I have no such thought. Nor have I any thought of a compromise, as if religion must give up something and science something. I wish the intellect to range with the utmost freedom, and religion to enjoy as equal freedom; but what I am proposing is that they should be found in one and the same place, and exemplified in the same persons. . . . I wish the same spots and the same individuals to be at once oracles of philosophy and shrines of devotion. It will not satisfy me, what has satisfied so many, to have independent systems, intellectual and religious, going at once, side by side, by a sort of division of labour, and only accidentally brought together. It will not satisfy me if religion is here and science there, and students converse with science all day, and lodge with religion in the evening. . . . I want the same roof to contain both the intellectual and the moral disciplines.

The chaplain will not be satisfied with himself and with his efforts. He will look down at his personal defects: his lack of required holiness and scholastic excellence and social talent and economic ability. And he could be discouraged on any natural basis.

But his is the optimism that is born of Christian hope, founded on faith, motivated by charity—and he is renewed and invigorated and confident in the undeniable and often evident work of the Spirit in the Church. And his is the work of the Church in the secular academic community. He is not, cannot be, discouraged. He may fail in many respects, but his work will succeed. For it is not *his* work, and he is the first to recognize and appreciate this happy fact.

—Richard Butler, O.P.

Father Richard Butler, O.P., National Chaplain of the Newman Apostolate in the United States, is the author of two books on the life and thought of George Santayana and one on the religious vocation. His new book, God on the Secular Campus, has just been published by Doubleday. "The Catholic Chaplain in the American University" will also appear in Pax Romana, the international Catholic student journal, published in Fribourg.