

## THE IDEA OF A UNIVERSITY – REVISITED

This evening, I want to look at three views of a university. The first view is that of John Henry Newman, later Cardinal Newman -- for whom Catholic student centers at major universities are named. Newman was born February 21, 1801 – so this lecture is being given on his birthday. Happy two hundred and fifth birthday, John Henry!

Newman's famous lectures were given in Dublin in 1852 and published in England in 1859 under the title The Idea of a University. Newman is writing well into the modern period yet I shall argue that Newman is giving voice, for the most part, to an idea of a university that goes back to the origins of universities in the middle ages – the time when his beloved Oxford was founded. I shall view Newman's approach as basically looking back at the best of the medieval universities, hence an institution born in **pre-modern times**.

In 1992, -- two years after the hundredth anniversary of Newman's death, the Sterling Professor of History at Yale University, Jaroslav Pelikan, published a book titled The Idea of the University: A Reexamination. I shall use this treatment as the basis for a portrait of the university that we know, namely a university in late **modern times**.

Finally, I will inquire into what a university might be like if it took seriously the environmental crisis, if we took seriously the turning point in which we stand – the transition from the modern epoch to a trans-modern epoch – to an emerging ecological epoch. What might such a **trans-modern** university look like? For this, I am especially indebted to a 1994 book by David Orr, Professor of Environmental Studies and Politics at Oberlin College in Ohio. The book is titled Earth in Mind: On Education, Environment and the Human Prospect.

So, three views: Call the first pre-modern, the second, modern and the third, trans-modern in the sense of beyond the modern. Before I sketch the three views of universities, let me show you the large, three part canvas on which I propose to paint the three pictures. In fact, without this background, I cannot hope to convince you of what is at stake.

Consider the **Pre-modern Epoch** as lasting from dawn of humanity through the classical and medieval ages. In this epoch, the whole was given precedence over the part, the community over still-emerging individuals. In its medieval European form, community was rank-ordered as in the military. The reigning worldview was a great Hierarchy – a great chain of being from God to inanimate matter. Authority flowed from above downward to the Lords Spiritual and the Lords Temporal, as if the King was God's VP for temporal affairs and the Pope was God's VP for spirituality affairs. It was literally the rule of Father knows best.

Around the year 1500, C.E., some 500 years ago, a great reversal occurs; the **Modern Epoch** begins. This period from 1500 to the present could also be called **Project Individualism**. The ideal of hierarchy is reversed, at least in theory. Equality and liberty become the new ideals. The English, American and French revolutions mark – in both literal and metaphorical fashion, the “death of kings.” The Protestant Reformation marks metaphorically the “death of popes.” Henceforth there would be no need for intermediaries between the individuals and their God, nor the individuals and their state. The cry is Liberty, Equality and Fraternity, although Fraternity (and in its wake Sorority) will be redefined. In science, in politics, in economics, the separate individual is king. Each person following his or her own self-interest will somehow redound to the good of all. The part replaces the whole as the focus of progress. In society, the parts --persons seen as separate and independent -- take precedence over the whole. In fact, the whole is simply viewed as a set of individuals.

Many beautiful achievements arose in this cultural epoch: modern science and medicine, human rights, modern democratic institutions and much more. Yet, we are discovering that modernity also has a darker and more destructive side. I believe that the modern age has placed us under what I will call “**the spell of separateness**.” We have been acting out this worldview on a stage with more and more people and more and more technological power, with nation states and trans-national corporations. An experiment

of extreme individualism played out for 500 years. And now we see that such a “**logic of the separate and the short term**” is undermining the very conditions for planetary life. The results are in — our way of life is unsustainable.

As I see it, five interlocking features are conspiring to weave the spell of separateness and produce a non-sustainable world. The five destructive features are these:

1. We start from **separateness** and see ourselves as **separate selves** rather than starting from **interconnection**, and seeing all as deeply interdependent.
2. We start from perceived **scarcity** rather than beginning from **inter-sufficiency** and seeing, in Gandhi’s words, that we have enough for our need but not for our greed.
3. We start with the **seen only** and go on to believe that only what is material and measurable counts. In the process, we fail to prize the **interweaving of both the seen and more subtle forces** such as love and loyalty, compassion and caring, justice and Golden Rule fairness.
4. We start with the **short term** – day by day, month by month, the next quarter in business, the next semester in college. We forget **intergenerational time**, forget that we stand in the midst of generations, forget the longer rhythms that help us honor the ancestors and serve the children.
5. We tend to see leadership in the individualistic model as “**superiority over**” rather than “**collaboration with.**” Hence, we fail to cultivate communities of learning committed to actions serving a common good beyond individual or group self-interest.<sup>1</sup>

This is the logic of modernity in its destructive guise: 5 seductive S’s: **separateness, scarcity, seen only, short term and superiority over**. Good people operating under this failed logic are causing massive harm. The signs are clear – we can’t get to a sustainable future from the place of business as usual. We can’t get to a sustainable future by thinking from within the cultural paradigm that generated the problems in the first place.

Is there hope? Yes, if we heed the call to bring to birth a new epoch, a **Trans-modern Epoch**, an **emerging ecological age**, with a vastly different sense of whole and parts. The invitation is to a worldview large enough to encompass the values of the pre-modern and the modern without their key limitations. In other words, a more encompassing synthesis with room for a renewed science, art and spirituality. The key is to reverse the logic of modernity by creating a **larger framework** and to do this consciously, effectively and inclusively. Against this background of three epochs, I will sketch three ideas of what a university might be.

### **Part I: The Best of the Pre-Modern – Newman’s Idea of a University.**

Let me start with the best of the pre-modern, Newman’s idea of a university. In 1851, John Henry Newman, England’s most illustrious Catholic convert in the Victorian era, was appointed the first rector of a proposed Catholic University of Ireland. Newman had been an Anglican priest and, for a good while, a tutor at his beloved Oriel College at Oxford. When Newman converted to Catholicism, he could no longer be a professor/ tutor at Oxford because all who attended and taught there were required to affirm the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Anglican Church. England also exercised long-time control of Ireland and of its higher education. Hence Irish Catholics were not permitted access to higher education – not in their own country nor in England. Tonight, I do not propose to outline the history of Newman’s ill-fated attempt to form such a university.<sup>2</sup> I do want to highlight the fact that Newman, in his new role, delivered a series of five lectures on the Idea of a University in Dublin in the spring of 1852 and he penned five more lectures later in that year. These lectures have since become famous under the title **The Idea of a University**.<sup>3</sup> They received their first publication in England seven years later, in 1859 – the same year that Darwin’s Origin of Species was published. I like the symbolism: Newman’s The Idea of a University appearing as a British publication in the same year as Darwin’s Origin of Species. I shall argue here that Newman is in many ways looking back to pre-modern notions of a university, notions deeply entrenched in his own

Oxford. Lest we romanticize, it is well to remember that Oxford in Newman's time was only for men, only for Christian men, and only for Christian men who affirmed the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Anglican Church. Newman's new university would expand that a bit. What did Newman believe to be the goals of a university?

He believed that undergraduate education, administered by the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, should take as its province – at least in principle – all knowledge and that it should produce a “cultivation of the intellect.”<sup>4</sup> He writes: “Certainly a liberal education does manifest itself in a courtesy, propriety and polish of word and action, which is beautiful in itself and acceptable to others; but it does much more. It brings the mind into form.”<sup>5</sup> . . . The intellect is to be “properly trained and formed to have a connected view or grasp of things.” “In the case of most . . ., it makes itself felt in . . .good sense, sobriety of thought, reasonableness, candor, self-command and steadiness of view . . . In some it will have developed habits of business, power of influencing others, and sagacity. In others it will elicit the talent of philosophical speculation, and lead the mind forward to eminence in this or that intellectual department. In all it will be a faculty of entering with comparative ease into any subject of thought, and of taking up with aptitude any science or profession.”<sup>6</sup> To be formed “to have a connected view or grasp of things” is the aim. Newman still takes it that we can attain to truth in the various disciplines of art and science. Yet to accomplish this, certain habit of mind (spilling over to habits of heart) need to be cultivated. Knowledge, truth, a grasp of the real is a good in itself. And formation so as to develop good judgment in investigation and assessment is likewise a good in itself. Such cultivation of what I would almost call “large-mindedness” need not be justified by practical outcomes. Such cultivation does not rest on utility to justify itself. And yet, Newman holds that what is good is also useful.<sup>7</sup> For Newman, intellectual cultivation is not the same as ethical or religious formation. And yet, a cultivated mind is not abstract, it is embodied. Here is Newman: “The man who has learned to think and to reason and to compare and discriminate and to analyze, who has refined his taste and formed his judgment and sharpened his mental vision, will not indeed at once be a lawyer . . . or a statesman, or a physician, or . . . a man of business, or a soldier or an engineer . . ., but he will be placed in that state of intellect in which he can take up any one of the sciences or callings . . . with an ease, a grace, a versatility, and a success, to which another is a stranger.”<sup>8</sup>

Although it is not the direct aim of a university to produce gentlemen, this, for Newman, will be a side-product of the type of **embodied, community-enhanced intellectual cultivation** he has in mind. For the cultivated intellect will -- in a community of the learned -- produce certain features of ethical character very much in the line of what Newman ascribes to the ideal of a gentleman. “It is,” says Newman, “almost a definition of a gentleman to say he is one who never inflicts pain. He has a concern to make every one at their ease and at home. . . . He is never mean or little in his disputes, never takes unfair advantage, never mistakes personalities or sharp sayings for arguments, or insinuates evil which he dare not say out. From a long-sighted prudence, he observes the maxim of the ancient sage, that we should ever conduct ourselves towards our enemy as if he were one day to become our friend. . . . [The gentleman] may be right or wrong in his opinion, but he is too clear-headed to be unjust. . . .”<sup>9</sup> Newman here is speaking of believer and unbeliever alike. In fact, this passage from which I only sample is embedded in a critique saying that such cultivation of intellect does not guarantee solid ethical judgment nor informed religious belief. Yet it goes a good distance along constructive ways. Furthermore, it will certainly aid one in responding to civic duties as well as domestic ones. In fact, elitist as the picture is, it has civic engagement aspects. For the young men of Newman's university are preparing to take their places in society's service. Newman makes the point explicitly. He writes: “A university training . . . aims at raising the intellectual tone of society, at cultivating the public mind, at purifying the national taste, at supplying true principles to popular enthusiasm and fixed aims to popular aspiration, at giving enlargement and sobriety to the ideas of the age, at facilitating the exercise of political power, and refining the intercourse of private life. It is the education which gives a man a clear conscious view of his own opinions and judgments, a truth in developing them, an eloquence in expressing them, and a force in urging them. It teaches him to see things as they are, to go right to the point, to disentangle a skein of thought, to detect what is sophistical, and to discard what is irrelevant. It prepares him to fill any post with credit and to master any subject with facility. It show him how to accommodate himself to others, how to throw himself into their state of mind, how to bring before them his own, how to influence them, how to come to an understanding with them, how to bear with them. He is at home in any society, he has

common ground with every class; he knows when to speak and when to remain silent; he is able to converse and able to listen; he can ask a question pertinently, and gain a lesson seasonably. . . . He has the repose of a mind which lives in itself, while it lives in the world. . . . He has a gift which serves him in public, and supports him in retirement.”<sup>10</sup> Such, as Newman sees it, are the benefits that come with what he calls “true enlargement of mind – the power of viewing many things at once as one whole, of referring them severally to their true place . . . , of understanding their respective values and determining their mutual dependence.”<sup>11</sup> In the core of his ideals for cultivating large-minded, intellectual virtues, there is still much for us to learn.

Before leaving Newman, I want to touch on one other point. He believes in a division of labor between teaching and research. Universities are places where teaching is central; research is left to the Learned Societies and special academies. As Newman says: “To discover and to teach are distinct functions; they are also distinct gifts, and are not commonly found united in the same person. He, too, who spends his day in dispensing his existing knowledge to all comers is unlikely to have either leisure or energy to acquire new.”<sup>12</sup> So Newman here sounds a cautionary note. Perhaps teaching and research often do pull against each other. Time with students can be seen as stealing time from research. Add leadership in the university community, and we are assuming that three capacities springing from three separate gifts will easily dwell together.

## **Part II: The Modern University -- Jaroslav Pelikan reexamines The Idea of a University.**

Let me visit briefly some modern notions of a university. Here, I take as my guide the Sterling Professor of History at Yale, Jaroslav Pelikan, who in 1992, published a book titled The Idea of the University: A Reexamination. What has happened since Newman’s classic and how does Pelikan assess the changes?

Certainly, the modern university benefits from the new individualism that marks the period, benefits from the new ideals that seek to reverse hierarchy in favor of equality and liberty. As the rights movements have taken hold, the modern university is more open and inclusive than ever the medieval university imagined. Women and minorities are welcomed; diversity is sought. And curriculum offerings have exploded -- offerings that range from modern languages to modern sciences and much more. Utility has entered in many ways – professional and pre-professional tracks are the norm. Commerce has become the reality factor, universities are spoken of as businesses and at the start of this new century, we speak of “the college experience” without even being embarrassed by it. Students are consumers of the college experience – a country-club-like hiatus before entering a harsher world. It is not rare to hear a student say: “I doubt I will remember what I learned in my classes, but I will cherish the college experience.” But I digress. This is hardly the best of modern universities, so let us look more carefully at what has changed.

Recall that Newman’s first principle was knowledge for its own sake. But this was more subtle than many have recognized. True, he highlighted certain intellectual virtues – a certain enlargement of mind – that was nurtured in a value-enhanced community-of-learning that prized what we might call life skills or emotional intelligence – namely a kind of character formation leading to a the behavior of a gentleman -- marked by kindness and fairness and large-mindedness. Recall that Newman held that the good was also useful. And he, along with John Dewey who was born in the year (1859) of the English publication of Newman’s reflections on universities, held that a liberal education served civic purposes. Newman wrote: **“If then a practical end must be assigned to a University . . . I say it is that of training good members of society. Its art is the art of the social life, and its end is fitness for the world.”**<sup>13</sup> Still the turn to more tangible practical uses would grow and grow as we moved through the modern period. There is, I think, a gain in focusing on first hand experience and drawing a closer link between knowledge and community betterment. Here I stand with Pelikan and Dewey. Yet the balance is delicate and tips easily into individual success. Vocational and professional training become of central value. You are majoring in what? How will you earn a living with that?

Law, Medicine and Theology had, since the Middle Ages, been what we would call graduate, professional education. During and shortly after Newman’s lifetime, as Professor Pelikan points out,

institutes of technology were already being formed. For example, MIT was established in 1861.<sup>14</sup> Yet it was the University of Berlin, founded in 1810, under the leadership of Wilhelm von Humbolt, that led the way to include basic research in its mandate. A century later, Adolf von Harnack, one of the most eminent of German scholars in the humanities, dedicating a research institute in Münster, stated: “I begin with a statement of faith: Never must our German universities and institutions of higher learning change their character of being devoted both to instruction and to research.”<sup>15</sup>

Newman, recall, asserted that the aim of the university was teaching, defining the university as “a place of teaching . . . Its object [being] the diffusion and extension of knowledge.” (Preface) **Professor Pelikan reflects modern practice by broadening that scope – speaking in one place of the four legs of the academic table being:** (1) the advancement of knowledge through research, (2) the transmission of knowledge through teaching [undergraduates, graduates and professionals], (3) the preservation of knowledge through scholarly collections [libraries, museums, galleries] and (4) the diffusion of knowledge through publishing.<sup>16</sup> And to give context to these functions, he acknowledges “the creation of a free and responsible community in which such advancement and diffusion of knowledge are an ongoing and unending process.”<sup>17</sup> Pelikan believes that such an expansion is in the spirit of Newman’s own reflections on development. Likewise, he stands with Newman in seeing mental formation as central to serious research. He does not want to lose what Newman spoke of so eloquently as “the liberal education of [those] who [have] learned to think and to reason and to compare and to discriminate and to analyze, who [have] refined [their] taste, and formed [their] judgment and sharpened [their] mental vision.”<sup>18</sup> Still and all, there is a difference. As does our own Teacher-Scholar document, Pelikan endorses “the principle that in the university the teachers who ‘extend’ the knowledge to students should also be investigators who ‘advance’ the knowledge.”<sup>19</sup> At one point Pelikan says that professors in research universities will spend one half their time in research and one half their time equally divided between undergraduate and graduate teaching.<sup>20</sup> In another place, where he is suggesting that universities offer teaching to adult learners, he reveals the tendency of research and publication to overshadow teaching. He writes: “It is often difficult enough to convince a scholar that undergraduate teaching itself is not a waste of time or a hindrance to scholarship, without having to make the additional case that the teaching of adults should also be included among the tasks of the university professor.”<sup>21</sup> Nowhere, it appears, does Professor Pelikan factor in university leadership as also among the tasks of the university professor, though certainly he knows this aspect well.

Pelikan also goes beyond Newman in affirming **a university mission to benefit the wider world**. He mentions as tasks of universities: to lessen violence and war through promoting international dialogue, to reduce famine and pestilence through developments in agriculture and medicine, and --in perhaps his only reference to environment, to increase awareness on that front. He notes how the university is called to provide the fruits of its labors to the local and national communities and to humankind. Yet he almost never extends that charge to concern for the non-human, natural world. Pelikan sees a dialectic between university teaching – especially in the professional schools – moving between nurturing a kind of idealism and moral sentiment and tempering this prophetic voice with the moderation of rational caution. Pelikan mentions the university in crisis but hardly sees any need for a radical rethinking of its assumptions. For a historian, the Sterling Professor of History at Yale seems oddly insensitive to larger cultural context. In this he stands with the majority in academia, namely fully vulnerable to David Orr’s scathing comment: “For the most part . . . we are still educating the young as if there were no planetary emergency.”<sup>22</sup> In fact, Pelikan doubts whether the university “has the capacity to meet a crisis that is not only ecological and technological, but ultimately educational and moral.”<sup>23</sup> Pelikan offers no sustained critique of his four legged table – no critique of teaching nor of research methods nor of publication nor of the future of libraries.<sup>24</sup> He wants to go beyond the “what” of information to “how” it is gained (method) and even asks a question or two about its point and purpose. But learning is still thought of as linear, left brain-directed and abstracted from concrete situations -- and much research is thought of that way as well. Finally, for a scholar whose five volume master work is on Christian Tradition: A History of Development of Doctrine, there is little in the way of exploring how ethics and the “spiritual” (or larger meaning context) might be integrated into the teaching and learning of the modern university.

I suggest that Pelikan's "status quo" vision of the university – and ours as well – mirrors all too well the limiting and limited assumptions of the modern age. So let us move to the future. I repeat David Orr's assessment: "For the most part . . . we are still educating the young as if there were no planetary emergency."<sup>25</sup> And with good reason perhaps, because to educate in wider ways requires us to recognize and escape from the destructive features of modernity. **What might a university look like that recognized that we are at a historical turning point – that the experiment in "individualism writ large" through nations and multi-national corporations is unsustainable? What might a university look like that recognized that the game is over or at least we are in the endgame. What is to be done?**

Thomas Berry, one of the prophets of our time from over in Greensboro, was asked what the university of the 21<sup>st</sup> century should be like to face the ecological challenge. He responded that this was easy. Just think of all the things we have done in higher education in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and do the opposite!

True enough, my five seductive S's – separateness, scarcity, seen only, short term and superiority over – these need to be reversed. But reversed in the sense of allowing for a wider and deeper synthesis of the pre-modern and modern for the sake of all beings. Otherwise, we will go – for example – from imbalance left (left brain linear) to imbalance right (right brain narrative). Indeed, much of what we learned from Newman's university and much of what has emerged in modern teaching, research, publishing and collecting is worthy of being included. At its best, it is not so much inappropriate as insufficient.<sup>26</sup>

### Part III: Higher Education in an Emerging Ecological Age

What then about higher education in an emerging ecological age? I suggest that we as a university community launch an ongoing discussion around five points:

From Separateness ----- to ----- **INTERCONNECTION**

From Scarcity ----- to ----- **INTERSUFFICIENCY**

From Seen Only ----- to ----- **INTERWEAVING OF SEEN & MORE SUBTLE ASPECTS**

From Short Term Only ----- to ----- **INTERGENERATIONAL TIME**

From "Superiority over" ----- to ----- **"INTERCOLLABORATION WITH"**

These five expansions are themselves deeply intertwined. Let's look at each in turn.

**First, from separateness to interconnection.** The university of the future will see itself as a community standing at a crucial point in world history and called to choose life – sustainable life for the entire web of life. Frederick Buechner writes: "To find our calling is to find the intersection between our own deep gladness and the world's deep hunger." How might a university stand at this intersection – between its own deep gladness and the world's deep hunger? How might a *university attuned to the times* discover a new sense of community with a new collective calling?

For at least 50 years, we have been summoned by many voices to shift from "**humans as center**" to "**the earth and all species as center.**" We have been invited us to see nature as the first manifestation of the sacred, invited to see "the earth from space" as the spiritual symbol of our time.<sup>27</sup> Thomas Berry speaks of the need to move from seeing everything as a **collection of objects** to seeing everything as a **communion of subjects**. He again and again takes as the standard **the evolving earth as a creative, self-sustaining subject**. For example, he writes that . . .

the earth is itself the primary physician,  
primary lawgiver,

primary revelation of the divine,  
primary scientist,  
primary technologist,  
primary commercial venture,  
primary artist,  
primary educator, and  
primary agent in whichever other activity  
we find in human affairs.<sup>28</sup>

Seeing ourselves as a precious part of this ongoing creation brings us a new sense of our mission at this historical moment. We at Elon seek to make ourselves a model of engaged learning. But learning for the sake of what? What is a big enough task – an inclusive enough story – to allow all of us to flourish? Will it not have to be as large as the earth itself – the earth as a self-regulating system of which we humans are but a part? David Orr also emphasizes “intimacy with the natural world,” emphasizes “nature as a standard” guiding our actions.<sup>29</sup> And Dr. Orr sees **the whole-university-in-all-its-functions -- the institution itself -- as the primary teacher of interconnection**. The university situated in its place and region with its actions rippling out into wider and wider circles – suppose we shine a light on this, so that who we are and what we do comes to be seen as having real effects on real people. Concrete systematic thinking and acting. A community with many perspectives aligned to sustain the life of the whole – is this not a worthy extension of our mission?

There is so much here in this first shift – from separateness to interconnection –

1. letting everything about the university be a theater of learning and teaching,
2. seeing ourselves part of the natural order and learning from the earth itself how to conduct ourselves, and
3. learning to make the community, the agent of learning – whether the community is a class or a department or a division or a specially convened task force.

At a recent conference sponsored by our department, one of the participants taught philosophy to children.<sup>30</sup> The class of children as a whole learned to frame issues, ask clarifying questions, assess consequences, and move to test their thinking. The whole class deployed these skills. Here the group is the learner and all give their gifts and perspectives. Not individuals learning for themselves but groups learning for their common life. Perhaps the children will lead us beyond the spell of separateness.

On the same theme – group learning, one of my students last semester complimented me in this way: He said: “I want to thank you for reading and taking seriously our daily written assignments and giving your comments. I want to thank you for nominating students each day to share insights in their writing with the whole class. We are learning to learn from one another.” Thus arises the seed of a new form of learning – the class as the agent of learning. A true learning community rather than a set of individual learners in one place. For all our talk, education remains remarkably individualistic at classroom or department levels. How might we become true learning communities bringing unique individual contributions to a common task dignified by an overarching goal?

All these aspects emerge as we shift from separateness to interconnection.

Next, consider the shift **from scarcity to intersufficiency**. I affirm that we each have all we need -- in ourself and in those who companion us -- to live a life of quality right here and right now. And we can seek to learn more, love more and serve the greater family of all beings more. This is to shift from a language of lack to a language of sufficiency or intersufficiency. We will never have enough so long as we believe we are not enough. The word “satisfaction” comes from the Latin “satis facere” -- to make it enough. To see limits as part of knowing our true size; to see simplicity not as denial but as enrichment. To return to elemental things, things David Orr lists quite beautifully – “things like flowing water, wind, trees, clouds, rain, mist, mountains, landscape, animals, changing seasons, the night sky, and the mysteries of the life cycle.”<sup>31</sup> In loving them, I would say, we return to a deep sense of intersufficiency. The gentle Vietnamese Zen teacher, Thich Naht Hanh, coined the term “interbeing” and says to the

reader of one of his books: “If you are a poet, you will see clearly that there is a cloud floating in this sheet of paper. Without a cloud, there will be no rain; without rain, the trees cannot grow; and without trees, we cannot make paper. The cloud is essential for the paper to exist. If the cloud is not here, the sheet of paper cannot be here either. So we can say that the cloud and the paper inter-are. “Interbeing” is a word that is not in the dictionary yet, but if we combine the prefix “inter” with the verb “to be,” we have a new verb, inter-are.”<sup>32</sup> If we look more closely we shall see the sun and the logger and the wheat that supports him or her and the logger’s mother and father are in it too. And so are we. This mode of thinking evokes gratitude and a sense that we are together and -- together -- have all we need.

The university I envision will come from intersufficiency – a sense that together we have enough and are enough. Paradoxically, in coming from true abundance, *we shall be able to simplify our lives and find more meaningful ways to match our own deep gladness with the world’s deep hunger.* We shall not be educating students to be part of a global economy that is non-sustainable. We shall be opening new imaginative vistas for local and regional living.

Third, we move **from the “seen only” to the interweaving of seen and unseen realities.** We are subtle fields of “mind-energy” spreading out dynamically in space and time. How beautiful! How fragile! And the more we experience our interbeing the more we are prompted to simplify – to remedy our greed with love, our anger with compassion and our delusions with living wisdom.

Stephen Jay Gould, speaks of “saving species and environments” by “forging an emotional bond between ourselves and nature.” He goes on to say: “We will not . . . save what we do not love.” David Orr adds: “And if we do not save species and environments, we cannot save ourselves; we depend on those species and environments in more ways than we can possibly know.”<sup>33</sup>

When we face our own dying, it will be all about how well we loved, not how many toys we amassed. It will be, as one author says, about “our belonging, not our belongings.” So love and care and fairness and justice and a sense of the common good must be reclaimed by a university fit for the task ahead. And we can start by planting and watering the seeds of humble wisdom, basic fairness, great compassion and loving kindness day by day.

Focus on the subtle forces will also involve overcoming our tendency to separate means and goals – to stop saying “now we are in school and later we will be in the real world.” Imagine rather every moment as a call to go deeply into what connects us – we have all we need in ourself and those who companion us – to live a life of quality right here and right now. Then to arise with new motivation to be of service.

Suppose we do honor more subtle connections. Suppose we truly believe we need one another. Then our teaching and learning will have place for heart as well as mind, empathetic connection as well as emotionless objectivity. And as we see ourselves coming from prior connection, we will also come to dismantle some of the disciplinary walls that separate us. We will bring into closer dialogue: ecology and economics, physics and politics, biology and business, philosophy and communication, education and drama, religion and health, and on and on. Perhaps multi-disciplinary inquiry groups will show the way. Suppose we were to form a set of multi-disciplinary groups here at Elon – with place for all sectors of the university community – staff, students and faculty. Suppose those task forces were to address real life issues in ways that honor diverse disciplines and elevate our sense of the common good.

The fourth shift is **from the “short term only” to a longer term perspective.** Let us move to intergenerational time. The native Americans speak of our standing in the midst of seven generations – three behind us and three in front of us. They suggest that, before we act, we should ask two questions: “*Will this honor the ancestors – my parents and their parents and their parents? Will this serve the children – my children and their children and their children?*” Can you feel the dignity here – dignity and purpose? Suppose every student, every faculty and every staff member awoke each morning with this intention – to honor the ancestors and to serve the children. Would that not evoke a sea change? We belong to a community of the dead and the living and the yet-to-be born. Our learning must be individual *and* collective – becoming a “community-of-learning-communities” for the sake of all our kin and the great

pattern of earth in its unfolding. Deeper forms of dialogue are called for and a deeper sense of how to learn collectively – with all sectors contributing to sustaining and enhancing what we are and what we do. We can honor the best of the right-wing and the left-wing for the sake of the children – children of humans and of all species -- for the sake of their future. We can honor the best of the pre-modern and modern – and let go of all sorts of narrow fundamentalisms – religious and economic and political, for the sake of the children, children of humans and of all species – for the sake of their future.<sup>34</sup>

Lastly, we are called to move from **from “superiority over” to “intercollaboration with”** – from “power over” to “partnership with”, in Rianne Eisler’s words. As learning becomes more a community function, new forms of collaboration will emerge – among students, between students and faculty, and between we humans and all the creatures-in-wider-nature that dwell with us in this place. In the process, we may even regenerate a form of democracy that goes beyond individual or group self-interest. In the process, we may discover ways of decision making that call on many perspective to make a more sustainable whole.

**Engaged learning in a dynamic community, innovation with a clear sense of how we best contribute to a sustainable world, honoring the ancestors and serving the children** – is this not a direction for this university?

Interbeing – intersufficiency – interweaving of the seen and subtle- intergenerational time – intercollaborative doing. These, I believe, give us a glimpse of some qualities of a truly trans-modern university. One age is dying and another is struggling to be born – like the phoenix. To paraphrase Rabbi Hillel, “If not us, who? If not here, where? And if not now, when?” Let this university be the phoenix it names itself. And let the phoenix rise!

Thank you very much.

John G. Sullivan,  
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February 21, 2006

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<sup>1</sup> For more on my model for analyzing the deficiencies of modernity, see my recent book Living Large: Transformative Work at the Intersection of Ethics and Spirituality (Laurel, MD: Tai Sophia Institute for the Healing Arts, 2004)

<sup>2</sup> For the history of the Catholic University of Ireland, consult the Catholic Encyclopedia online at <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15199b.htm> Although appointed in 1852, Newman only served as rector for four years – from 1854 when he took the oaths to 1858.

<sup>3</sup> On Newman, I began using John Henry Newman, The Idea of a University, Introduction and Notes by Martin J. Svaglic (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1982) Introduction and notes © 1960. I later profited from the edition: John Henry Newman, The Idea of a University, Frank M. Turner, editor (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996). This edition is in the “Rethinking the Western Tradition” series, and has valuable essays by Martha McMackin Garland, Sara Castro-Klarén, George P. Landow, George M. Marsden and Frank M. Turner.

<sup>4</sup> Preface, Svaglic edition, p. xlii

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Preface, Svaglic edition, pp. xliii-xliv

<sup>7</sup> Discourse VII, 5, Svaglic edition, p. 124.

<sup>8</sup> Discourse VII, 6, Svaglic edition, p. 125.

<sup>9</sup> Discourse VIII, 10, Svaglic edition, pp. 159-160

<sup>10</sup> Discourse VII, 10, Svaglic edition, pp. 134-135

<sup>11</sup> Discourse VI, 6, Svaglic edition, p. 103

<sup>12</sup> Preface, Svaglic edition, p. xl

<sup>13</sup> Discourse VII, 10, Svaglic, p. 134.

<sup>14</sup> Jaroslav Pelikan, The Idea of a University: A Reexamination (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), p. 20

<sup>15</sup> Quoted in Pelikan, p. 84

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<sup>16</sup> Pelikan, pp. 16-17.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. p. 181; see also p.142

<sup>18</sup> Newman, quoted in Pelikan, p. 101, modified for inclusiveness by me.

<sup>19</sup> Pelikan, p. 79

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 92

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 185

<sup>22</sup> David W. Orr, Earth in Mind: On Education, Environment, and the Human Prospect (Washington, DC: Island Press, 1994), p.27

<sup>23</sup> Pelikan, pp. 21-22; quoted Orr, op.cit., p. 27.

<sup>24</sup> For example, historian Page Smith in his book Killing the Spirit (New York: Viking, 1990) writes: “The vast majority of so-called research turned out in the modern university is essentially worthless. It does not result in any measurable benefit to anything or anybody. It does not push back those omni-present ‘frontiers of knowledge’ so confidently evoked; it does not *in the main* result in greater health or happiness among the general populace or any particular segment of it. It is busywork on a vast, almost incomprehensible scale. It is dispiriting; it depresses the whole scholarly enterprise; and most important of all, it deprives the student of what he or she deserves – the thoughtful and considerate attention of a teacher deeply and unequivocally committed to teaching.” (p. 7; quoted in Orr’s Earth in Mind p.10)) David Orr would get at the matter in a different way. He suggests that all candidates for tenure appear before an institution-wide forum to answer questions such as the following:

- ◆ Where does your field of knowledge fit in the larger landscape of learning?
- ◆ Why is your particular expertise important? For what and for whom is it important?
- ◆ What are its wider ecological implications and how do these affect the long-term human prospect?
- ◆ Explain the ethical, social, and political implications of your scholarship?

See Earth in Mind, p. 102.

<sup>25</sup> See Orr, op. cit., p. 2.

<sup>26</sup> In this particular setting, I take the notion of necessary but insufficient from Daniel Pink. See Daniel H. Pink, A Whole New Mind: Moving from the Information Age to the Conceptual Age (New York: Riverhead Books, 2005), p.162.

<sup>27</sup> I think, for example, of Peter Russell in his book The global Brain (Los Angeles: J. P. Tacher, 1983).

<sup>28</sup> See Thomas Berry, The Dream of the Earth (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1988), p.107

<sup>29</sup> See Orr, Earth in Mind, p. 141.

<sup>30</sup> The conference, “Philosophy as Transformative Practice,” was designed by the Elon Philosophy Department and held at Elon University Oct. 20-22, 2005. The participant I have in mind is Dr. Megan Laverty, assistant professor of Philosophy and Education in the Department of Arts and Humanities at Teachers College of Columbia University. For more, see the Elon Philosophy Department website at <http://www.elon.edu/philosophy>

<sup>31</sup> Orr, op. cit., p. 141.

<sup>32</sup> See Thich Nhat Hanh, Peace is Every Step: The Path of Mindfulness in Everyday Life New York: Bantam Books, 1991), p. 95

<sup>33</sup> See Orr, op. cit., p. 140; the Gould quote is from September 1991 Natural History, p. 14.

<sup>34</sup> David Bohm, Peter Senge and others have done work here. See, for example, See David Bohm, Wholeness and the Implicate Order (New York: Routledge, 1980) and his On Dialogue, edited by Lee Nichol (New York: Routledge, 1996). For more on Bohm’s sense of dialogue, see William Isaacs, Dialogue and the Art of Thinking Together (New York: Random House Currency Books, 1999) and Linda Ellinor and Glenna Gerard, Dialogue: Rediscovering the Transforming Power of Conversation (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1998). For learning together, see Peter Senge’s now classic The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization (New York: Random House Currency Books, 1990). See also Peter Senge, C. Otto Scharmer, Joseph Jaworski, Betty Sue Flowers Presence: Human Purpose and the Field of the Future (Cambridge, MA: The Society for Organizational Learning, Inc., 2004) Most recently, see Sharon Daloz Parks’ book on the teaching approach of Ron Heifetz at the Harvard Kennedy School, Leadership Can be Taught (Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Publishing, 2005).