

Newman Studies Journal, Vol. 13, Issue 1, Spring 2016: Special Issue

CALL FOR PAPERS:

John Henry Newman, Ecumenism, and Secularism

While the debate on ecumenism, in more or less explicit terms, has been going on since the first centuries of the Church's existence, it is during the last few decades that more in-depth and systematic discussions have begun to occupy the center stage of Christian theology and spiritual life. This tendency will doubtless become even more pronounced in the future. The election of Pope Francis and his unusual relationship with the Orthodox Churches, the fiftieth anniversary of the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council and its renewed understanding, and, most especially, the summoning of the 2016 Pan-Orthodox Council in Constantinople are only the most dramatic of many recent events that mark the increasing prominence of this discourse.

In such a crucial historical moment, John Henry Newman's life and work may provide key insights and methodological tools for addressing the most pressing fundamental issues that ecumenical dialogue has to face. In our Spring 2016 issue, the *Newman Studies Journal* plans to explore a number of general and specific topics related to the intra-Christian concern for and efforts toward unity, with particular emphasis on the confrontation between religious and secular perspectives on ecumenism as well as on its premises and consequences.

In 1864, tracing the history of his religious opinions, Newman wondered if it was not "one's duty, instead of beginning with criticism, to throw oneself generously into that form of religion which is providentially put before one," and whether we should not "look for a blessing through obedience even to an erroneous system, and a guidance even by means of it" (*Apologia pro Vita Sua*, London: Longman, Green, and Co., 1864, 332).

This questioning is not an accidental or secondary element in Newman's thought. Rather, it expresses an essential dimension of his personal and intellectual agenda, which has contributed to the fundamentally problematic character of his reception. On one hand, Newman has been described as a prophet of ecumenism and religious freedom, a Catholic intellectual able to recognize and give meaning to the intrinsic value of all faiths in the human search for Truth. On the other hand, he has been criticized for his openness to what he himself defined as "erroneous systems," and his stance has been alternately depicted as a simplistic or pseudo-agnostic attempt to reconcile the dialectic between freedom and truth.

In this sense, the history of the reception of Newman's thought reflects in an exemplary manner the clash of worldviews and interests accompanying the question of how to define the rationale for ecumenical theology and practice, which is often at risk of being interpreted as a disguised expression of the modern, secular indifference toward religions.

Prospective authors are invited to submit high-quality paper proposals presenting original and critical reflections on any aspect of this question, without chronological or geographic restriction. Papers may employ any humanistic, scientific, or other methodology, and may address theoretical developments, critical analyses, disciplinary issues, and/or case studies.

Proposers might consider the following subject areas, viewed in the light of, or in contrast to, Newman's biography, work, and reception:

- Ecumenism and interreligious dialogue: sources, leaders, ideas, theologies
- Ecumenism and migration
- Ecumenical and missionary calling of the Churches
- Women and ecumenism
- Scripture in ecumenical dialogue
- Churches' decision-making processes on ecumenical matters
- The role of ecumenism in the formation of a global Christianity
- Long-term problems related to the quest for Christian unity
- Individual figures and elaborative centers of ecumenical theology and practice
- Complexity and peculiarity of twentieth- and twenty-first-century ecumenical movement
- Geopolitical factors and implications in the history of ecumenism

Potential contributors should send a 500-word outline of their proposed article, together with their university and/or other professional affiliation/s and a short résumé, to the Managing Editor, Celeste Barker Bright, Ph.D., at cbright@ninsdu.org **no later than September 1, 2015**.