John Henry Newman's Catholic University Church in Dublin

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THE decision to establish a Catholic University in Dublin was taken by the Archbishops and Bishops of Ireland meeting at the National Synod of Thurles in the year 1850. As a first step, the Synod set up the Catholic University Committee, one of whose members was the Reverend Dr Paul Cullen, Apostolic Delegate to Ireland and soon to become Archbishop of Dublin. One of the most energetic advocates of the establishment of a Catholic University, Dr Cullen had not long returned to this country after many years in Rome as Rector of the Irish College. In July 1851, largely on his own initiative, he invited Dr John Henry Newman to become the new University's first Rector.[1]

John Henry Newman had been the most prominent member of the Oxford Movement in England. As Vicar of St Mary's University Church, Oxford, his preaching and writing had given rise to frequent controversy, culminating in the clamorous reaction to his Tract 90, published in 1841. His subsequent (1845) conversion to Roman Catholicism had obliged him to leave the University which he loved so much. He had gone to Rome and there, in June 1847, he had been ordained a priest and had joined the Oratory founded by Saint Philip Neri. On his return to England, Newman had founded the Oratory there at Maryvale, Birmingham, in February 1848. He had many anxieties and administrative problems connected with the new Oratory and he was kept very busy preaching and writing. Nevertheless he accepted Dr Cullen's invitation to come to Dublin and, in a series of discourses delivered at the Rotunda, set out his ideas on the scope and nature of University education.[2]

'We must have a Church, temporary or permanent, and it must be decorated.'

In Newman's idea of a Catholic University a Church was essential. His note *What I aimed at*[3] begins 'I want . . . . here to set down various measures I had in purpose as a means of setting off the University . . . . The first expedient which suggested itself to me was the erection, or the provision, of a University Church. I suppose I had it in mind as

early as, or earlier than, any other work.' For Newman, a University Church would have both a symbolic and a practical value. Primarily, it would symbolize 'the great principle of the University, the indissoluble union of philosophy with religion'. This is an idea to which he returned more than once and which he stressed in his Report to the University for the first year of its work, 1854-1855. The practical value of a church was, first of all, that it would provide a setting for University sermons. University preaching was one of the institutions which Newman was anxious to establish from the beginning of his connection with Dublin. From his own experience at Oxford he well knew the powerful influence a preacher could exercise in a University. He was anxious also to use the sermons as a means of 'interesting the clergy in the University, the preachers being taken from all parts of the country'. Besides its use for sermons, the church would also be valuable as providing a suitable setting for the formal and public acts of the University – degree giving, solemn lectures and addresses on important occasions. For these it would provide a large hall and one which, in his own words, 'was ennobled by the religious symbols which were its furniture'.

Believing so firmly in the essential importance of a church to the University, Newman, from the beginning of his time in Dublin, set about the practical task of providing one. He considered several possibilities. The first was that he might use the existing church of St Audoen in High Street. This church was newly built and Newman was attracted to the idea of using it, partly by the fact of its being close to 'the two famous churches of Dublin, St Patrick's and Christ Church'.[4] In January 1855 he entered into negotiations with the parish priest, Father Patrick Mooney, but it is clear that the alterations which Newman proposed to make to the interior arrangements of the church in order to adapt it to University use would have made it extremely difficult for Fr Mooney to administer it as a parish church at the same time.[5] Accordingly, in April the project was abandoned. The best solution seemed to be to build a church himself – but where? The first site he considered lay behind the house he was occupying in Harcourt Street, but in June, 'at the last moment the tenant occupying the premises needed refused to make way for him'[6] and so this plan failed. Immediately, he thought of another. He would buy number 80 or number 85 St Stephen's Green. Number 80 was the property of Judge Burton and was to come on the market in August. Number 85 was next door to the University House (number 86) and it too was

owned by a Judge – Judge Ball, who was well disposed towards the new University. But to acquire either of these properties would have taken time, and precious weeks of good weather would be lost in which building could be started. So, when the opportunity presented itself of acquiring number 87 Newman seized it. On June 23rd, 1855, he wrote to a friend: 'I have signed the agreement for the ground this day – and shall begin building my Church at once.'[7] Number 87 St Stephen's Green is a brick-fronted terrace house. It has none of the splendour of number 86, next door, or of numbers 85 or 80, but it has a certain charm of its own. Its garden stretched back as far as those of the greater houses nearby, to the wall of Iveagh Gardens. Upon it Newman built his church.

The man to whom Newman turned for help in the building and decoration of his church was John Hungerford Pollen.[8] Born in 1820, almost twenty years Newman's junior, he had gone up to Oxford in 1838, just when Newman's influence there was at its height, and had heard him preach. In the year of Tract 90 he was elected Fellow of Merton College. In 1846, the year after Newman's reception into the Catholic Church, Pollen was ordained an Anglican priest, and in 1847 went to minister at St Saviour's in Leeds. But it was not long before he was to follow Newman's way, and in October 1852 he was received into the Roman Catholic Church at Rouen in Normandy.

Along with his other achievements, John Pollen had shown considerable talent for and interest in the arts. At Oxford in 1844 he designed and painted the decoration of the roof of the church of St Peter-le-Bailey, where he would shortly minister as deacon. In 1850 a more important commission came his way, to design and paint the roof of Merton College Chapel. This was to occupy his leisure time for more than a year, and would provide the occasion of his meeting with John Everett Millais.[9] Certain elements of Pollen's taste at this time, notably his interest in the renewal of religious art, linked him with contemporary artistic movements both in England and abroad. In England these were the years of the Pre-Raphaelite Movement with which he was soon to be actively connected. Pollen's taste had been formed and would continue to be nourished by his extensive travels. On all his journeys he filled his notebooks with descriptions, water-colour sketches and drawings of all the sites, architectural monuments and works of art that he encountered, but he was particularly attracted by the art of the Middle Ages. Now that he had forfeited his living as an Anglican priest and had, in addition, been cut out of the will of his uncle, Sir John Pollen, John Hungerford Pollen was obliged to support

himself. He could reasonably expect to turn his artistic talents to good use. Late in 1853 Pollen set out once more for Rome. There he became engaged to a young English girl, Maria La Primaudaye, whose father was a friend of Dr Newman. In November 1854 Newman wrote to Maria's father inviting Pollen to come to Dublin as Professor of Fine Arts in the new Catholic University.

In John Pollen Newman had found a man whose personal history was rather similar to his own, one who could be expected to share his views on what a Catholic University should be. The two men did not meet until May 1855 but immediately upon his acceptance of the Professorship, at Christmas 1854, Newman entrusted Pollen with the decoration of the church he was so anxious to provide. 'We must have a Church', he wrote to Pollen, 'temporary or permanent, and it must be decorated – and I should be very much obliged for your assistance in the decoration.'[10]

> '. . . My idea was to build a large barn and decorate it in the style of a Basilica, with Irish marbles and copies of standard pictures.'[11]

The basic ideas for the building and decoration of University Church came from Dr Newman. Newman had a great enthusiasm for the ancient basilicas of Italy. In Pollen's words, 'he felt a strong attachment to those ancient churches with rude exteriors but solemn and impressive within, recalling the early history of the Church, as it gradually felt its way in the converted Empire . . .'[12] The exterior of Newman's Church is perfectly plain. Indeed, there would have been little point in giving it any kind of architectural distinction, since it is not visible from the street, lying as it does behind the house at number 87. The street entrance is marked by a porch which leads down a short flight of steps to the passage-way running between numbers 87 and 86, and then to the church itself. Once inside, the visitor finds himself under a low gallery supported by a small forest of slender pillars, a dark area through which he can see the main body of the church bathed in light. Perhaps nowhere else in the church is the atmosphere of the Italian basilicas so irresistibly evoked as here, in the shadows of this crypt-like 'ante-chapel' as Pollen called it.

Structurally, the Roman basilicas are simple buildings. The typical ground-plan is a rectangle, divided by two rows of columns into a wide nave and two side aisles, the nave normally terminating in a semi-circular apse. Like its models, Newman's church is a rectangle. Following the dimensions and orientation of the garden on which it is built, it measures one hundred and twenty feet in overall length (north-south)

by thirty-six feet in width (east-west). The sanctuary (at the south end) has a semi-circular apse. Unlike the Roman churches, however, it is not divided into a nave and aisles. In building this church, maximum advantage had to be taken of the available space, which was already very restricted. While it was obviously impractical to articulate the space with real arcades, the visual impression these create has been evoked in the decoration of the lower part of the walls. There, in the marble inlay, are set a series of shafts of light coloured marble, vertically grained, with plinths and alabaster capitals carved in relief. These are linked by painted lunettes whose outlines are clearly marked in white, giving the impression of a series of semi-circular arches resting on free-standing pillars.

The church is covered by a flat timbered ceiling. Pollen would have preferred an open roof, in the Italian manner, but that would not have been so satisfactory acoustically in a church intended primarily for preaching.[13] The beams and joists are painted a deep red and between them on the plaster Pollen painted a design of foliage scrolls on a green background, giving a light, airy effect to the whole. High up in the walls, just under the roof, are the windows, grouped irregularly. They are glazed with 'bull's eyes', thick knots of glass of a faintly green colour which light the church very effectively.

As in many of the ancient churches of Italy, the floor of the sanctuary in Newman's church is raised above the level of the nave, and is approached by a flight of steps. A short alabaster communion-rail runs across the centre of the nave at the foot of the steps, leaving access open at either side. An unusual feature of the sanctuary is the choir-gallery which flanks one side of it. The idea of providing such a gallery seems to have been Newman's own, and to have been linked with his care for liturgical music.[14]

His letter of June 23rd, 1855, to F.S. Bowles reveals that the first item he thought of providing for the church was an organ. 'My dear Frederic', he wrote, 'Will you tell me what sort of an *Organ* you would recommend me to get, as to stops etc. etc. for £250? I have signed an agreement for the ground this day – and shall begin building my Church at once. I have already been with an organ builder, Telford who is a good man.' The raised arches which support the gallery were also probably Newman's own choice, as he had a particular liking for them.[15] Opposite the gallery, but outside the sanctuary, is the pulpit, whose decorative elements of pillars, carved capitals and marble inlay evoke memories of twelfth and thirteenth century pulpits in Italian churches. The placing of the choir-gallery where it is might have been expected to create an impression of imbalance, but such is not the case.

In fact, the asymmetrical relationship of the gallery and the pulpit lends a refreshing feeling of spontaneity to the arrangement of the church.

Not many of the ancient basilicas of Italy have retained the marble *intarsiatura* which once decorated their walls, but at Ravenna, the 'Orthodox' Baptistery and the apse of San Vitale are splendid examples from the fifth and sixth centuries. From a somewhat later date the great basilica of St Mark in Venice provides even richer examples of this work, and St Mark's was evidently in Newman's mind when he decided to decorate the walls of his church with the choicest Irish marble. 'To Irish productions we shall be indebted for a variety in colour and vein which might almost vie with St Mark's at Venice, that mine of the most precious relics of antiquity.'[16] Newman's marbles came from all over Ireland, greens from Galway, reds from Cork, greys and browns from Laois and Armagh, black from Kilkenny. They came, we are told, 'at immense expense', cut in slabs 'some three or four times the thickness of those used in most of the more sumptuous palaces of Imperial Rome, if we may judge from the fragments that strew the soil of these wonderful ruins.'[17] The marbles cover the walls of University Church to a height of fifteen feet. They are arranged in three registers. The lowest register contains the fictive columns in veined green, with their carved capitals in the contrasting pale alabaster. Between the columns are inlaid rectangles of reds and browns, sombre colours in the nave, brighter colours in the sanctuary, all the rectangles bordered in black. Above these a register of red provides a uniform background to the painted lunettes. Finally, a deep band of rich and varied colours, bordered in delicate greens, runs across the top of the lunettes. This band is carried on into the sanctuary across the arches of the choir gallery, thus unifying the whole decorative scheme of the walls of both nave and sanctuary.

The upper walls of the church, above the marbles, carry a series of large paintings, now so much darkened as to be almost illegible. These are the 'copies of standard pictures' of which Newman spoke. The models for them were the tapestries which Raphael designed for the Sistine Chapel at the Vatican, and the figures of the Apostles from the abbey church of Tre Fontaine just outside Rome. In 1515 Raphael was commissioned by Pope Leo X to provide cartoons for ten tapestries, nine of them being very large, which were intended to be hung on solemn occasions on the lower walls of the Sistine Chapel.[18] They illustrate events in the lives of Saints Peter and Paul and the death of the proto-martyr, St Stephen, and were an important element of the

iconography of the papal chapel. The nine large tapestries are copied in University Church. Beginning on the left wall, and moving back from the altar, they are the *Stoning of St Stephen,* the *Sacrifice of Lystra,* the *Blinding of Elymas*, the *Healing of the Lame Man at the Beautiful Gate*, followed on the right wall, moving up towards the altar, by the *Death of Ananias*, the *Miraculous Draught of Fishes, Christ's Charge to Peter, Paul Preaching at Athens* and the *Conversion of Saul.* The tenth subject in University Church is the *Descent of the Holy Spirit,* taken from another source; the tenth tapestry in the Vatican is a very narrow strip with *Paul in Prison.*[19] Between these large paintings are set the figures of the Apostles, copied from the frescoes on the pillars of the nave at Tre Fontane. In Newman's time these works, too, were attributed either to Raphael or to his school.

The selection of these paintings and the arrangements for their execution were the personal concern of Dr Newman. On February 1st, 1956, he wrote to Pollen from Rome, telling him how the original plan to have the paintings done in Florence had fallen through and how he had made fresh arrangements in Rome. 'I have arranged the following plan with your friend M. Platner . . .', he wrote:

> We have engaged a French painter, a friend of Platner's – to paint a number of subjects as follows, the figures to be 6 feet high or thereabouts . . . There will be ten quadri, divided by11 or if possible 12 figures. The figures will be the Apostles from the Tre Fontane, of Raffaeli or the school of Raffaelli. The quadri will be Raffaelli's Arazzi (i.e. the cartoons of which seven are at Hampton Court). They will be all painted on canvas or [in?] tempera and will last any time and stand any weather. We have seen a specimen this morning and it is admirable . . . I have *committed* myself to all this, with the advice of Platner and Cholmeley . . .

This letter was accompanied by a sketch showing how Newman envisaged the spacing of the pictures – almost exactly as they are today.[20] Pollen seems to have had at least some doubts about all this. On February 13th Newman wrote to him again, asking him not to alter the instructions given to the painter about the borders, and adding the postscript: 'If you don't like the pictures, we shall be quite content to intercept them here at Birmingham . . .' Five days later, to another friend, Newman wrote: '. . . and Pollen is still in anxiety about the breezy Raffaelles'. What Pollen's anxiety was is difficult to determine precisely but it cannot have been that he objected to the choice of models by Raphael for he had previously made a selection of pictures which included 'Raffaelle's cartoon'. Newman's 'only criticism' of that

selection had been 'that perhaps you were mixing styles. Raffaelle's cartoon and Fra Angelico.'

Pollen's connection with 'M. Platner' is a point of some interest. In the early nineteenth century Rome was still the great school for young artists from all over Europe. In 1810 a group of German painters, who had formed themselves into a community called the Brotherhood of St Luke, went to Rome. They settled in the Irish Franciscan Convent of St Isidore's, which had been secularized under the Napoleonic regime. Living as a religious community, they divided their days between work and prayer, striving towards the ideal of unifying art and life in a Christian context. Soon they abandoned Lutheranism for Roman Catholicism and their strange dress and long beards earned them the nickname of 'the Nazarenes'. The leaders of this group were Friedrich Overbeck and Franz Pforr, and one of the most prominent members was Peter Cornelius. Cornelius, however, did not live at St Isidore's, preferring to keep his independence. After the death of Pforr in 1812 the Brotherhood as such ceased to exist but the group continued to work for the same ideals. Stylistically, they modelled themselves on the German artist Durer, and on Raphael and Pinturicchio among the Italians, more particularly on Raphael. Their indebtedness to these models is manifest in the frescoes which they painted in the Casa Bartholdy and the Villa Massimo in Rome. From 1818 Cornelius was patronized by Crown Prince Ludwig of Bavaria and executed a number of important frescoes in Munich. By 1854, however, he was back in Rome where Pollen met him and admired his work. Overbeck, on the other hand, remained in Rome and he too was among the artists whom Pollen met in 1854. In 1850 Overbeck's assistant was Ferdinand Platner. Platner was born in Rome in 1824, son of a painter and writer on art who had settled there at the beginning of the century. In 1856, when Newman went to Rome to negotiate for the pictures for University Church, Platner was living near St Isidore's. It is certainly characteristic that the works he recommended to Newman were copies after Raphael. The executants of the paintings are named in the *Catholic University Gazette*[21] as MM. Sublet and Soulacroix. Both these men were young French artists whose primary interest was in religious works, Soulacroix being a sculptor as well as a painter.

'The Apse is magnificent'

The area of University Church which most fascinatingly reflects the personality of John Pollen and the various sources of his inspiration

is the apse. The semi-dome is also the most important painting which he himself executed in the church. In the centre is the Virgin enthroned as *Sedes Sapientiae,* the Seat of Wisdom. Above her, wings outstretched, is the dove representing the Holy Spirit, and above him a jewelled cross. At the summit, a glory of rays in brilliant colours emanates from the hand of God. Rising from the centre of the base, as if it were growing from the altar, a vine sends its branches coiling outwards in a series of circles which fill the whole space of the semi-dome. In each of these circles, on a dark ground contrasted with the gold, stands a saint bearing a palm branch. All kinds of birds inhabit the tendrils of the vine and animals – deer, rabbits, a pelican – can be seen among the grass and flowers at its root. A broad border runs along the base of the semi-dome, with a motif of vine branches enclosing small medallions in which there are more exotic birds, on a blue ground. Around the inside rim is another border. There, too, is the vine branch, now laden with grapes, green on a purple ground.

The overall composition of this work derives from the apse mosaic of the church of San Clemente in Rome. There, at the foot of the cross, grows a vine whose branches coil outwards in a pattern of circles filling the whole space. 'We shall liken the Church of Christ to this vine', runs the inscription at the base of the mosaic, 'which the law makes wither, but which the Cross brings to life.' The branches of the vine at San Clemente teem with life, exotic birds and strange stylized flowers filling the circles made by its branches. Some of Pollen's details also derive from this and other Italian mosaics. The deer drinking at the fountain is a motif frequently found, and the jewelled cross suggests the magnificent Byzantine cross in the apse of Sant'Apollinare in Classe at Ravenna. But there are other memories too in Pollen's apse. The figure of the *Sedes Sapientiae* is Flemish, not Italian, in inspiration and strikingly recalls a wood-carved Virgin enthroned in the Musée des Beaux-Arts at Ghent, which Pollen may have known. On two occasions, at least, before he came to Dublin, John Pollen was in Ghent. He spent long hours in the Cathedral there, meditating on the Van Eyck masterpiece, 'The Adoration of the Lamb'. What he had to say about the meaning of this apse painting in Dublin indicates clearly his source of inspiration for its iconography – 'virgins of either sex surrounding the *Sedes Sapientiae* in the centre, as types of immaculate purity. The field below and the branches have birds, insects and animals, intended to represent the homage of that portion of Creation into which sin has not entered, or which has been redeemed from it.' Of Van Eyck's work he had written: 'The picture is brimful of ideas. His great wish is to represent creation as *restored*; everything as if the

Fall had not been . . . Paradise is once again a garden. Its field is studded with violets and white flowers, types of penitence and chastity . . .' The palm-bearing saints which fill the medallions in the Dublin apse breathe a certain fragrance of Ghent.

Newman loved this apse. On November 9th, 1856, he wrote to Pollen, 'You will like a line from me . . . I write before High Mass. The apse is magnificent . . .' He added a postscript: 'I have come from High Mass – The more I looked at the Apse, the more beautiful it seemed to me – and, to my taste, the church is the most beautiful one in the three Kingdoms.' Although the church had been opened for six months, the apse had only just been finished and some other work remained to be done. One item still needing attention was the *baldacchino*. It had been put in place over the high altar but had not yet been gilded. The *baldacchino* is made of deal, with five small domes and other decorative carving giving it a Venetian look. Behind it, along the entire width of the apse, runs a broad decorative band with a formal pattern of circles filled with a stylized flower motif, linked by elements of lattice work. The circles and lattice elements are in glazed white ceramic tiles which stand out sharply against the dark red ground, the whole band being enclosed in bright green borders. The purpose of this band is to mark the transition from the painted area of the semi-dome to the marble inlay on the lower walls of the apse. It does so effectively, but perhaps too starkly, in that the particular shade of green used in its borders does not fit with the green marble on the wall below, and does not occur elsewhere in the church. Compositionally, it is more in keeping, as it carries the circle motif through from the semi-dome to the area immediately behind the altar which acts as a reredos. There, circular studs of glass are set into a framework of alabaster and marble, giving a jewelled effect as they reflect the light of the candles on the altar.

A similar jewelled effect is created by the decoration of the alabaster altar frontal with its twelve disks of Derbyshire fluor-spar crystals; in Pollen's words, 'the twelve typical precious stones'. These stones are set in the alabaster framework in two groups of six. In the centre of the frontal the framework forms an outline of a cross. Each of the nine compartments formed by this cross has an inset panel painted on a gold ground. Christ in Majesty appears on the panel in the centre of the cross, the evangelists John and Matthew to his right and left, Mark and Luke above and below him. In the corners are the doctors of the Latin Church, Augustine and Ambrose at the top, Gregory and Jerome below. As with the composition of the semi-dome of the

Plate 1 The apse and altar.

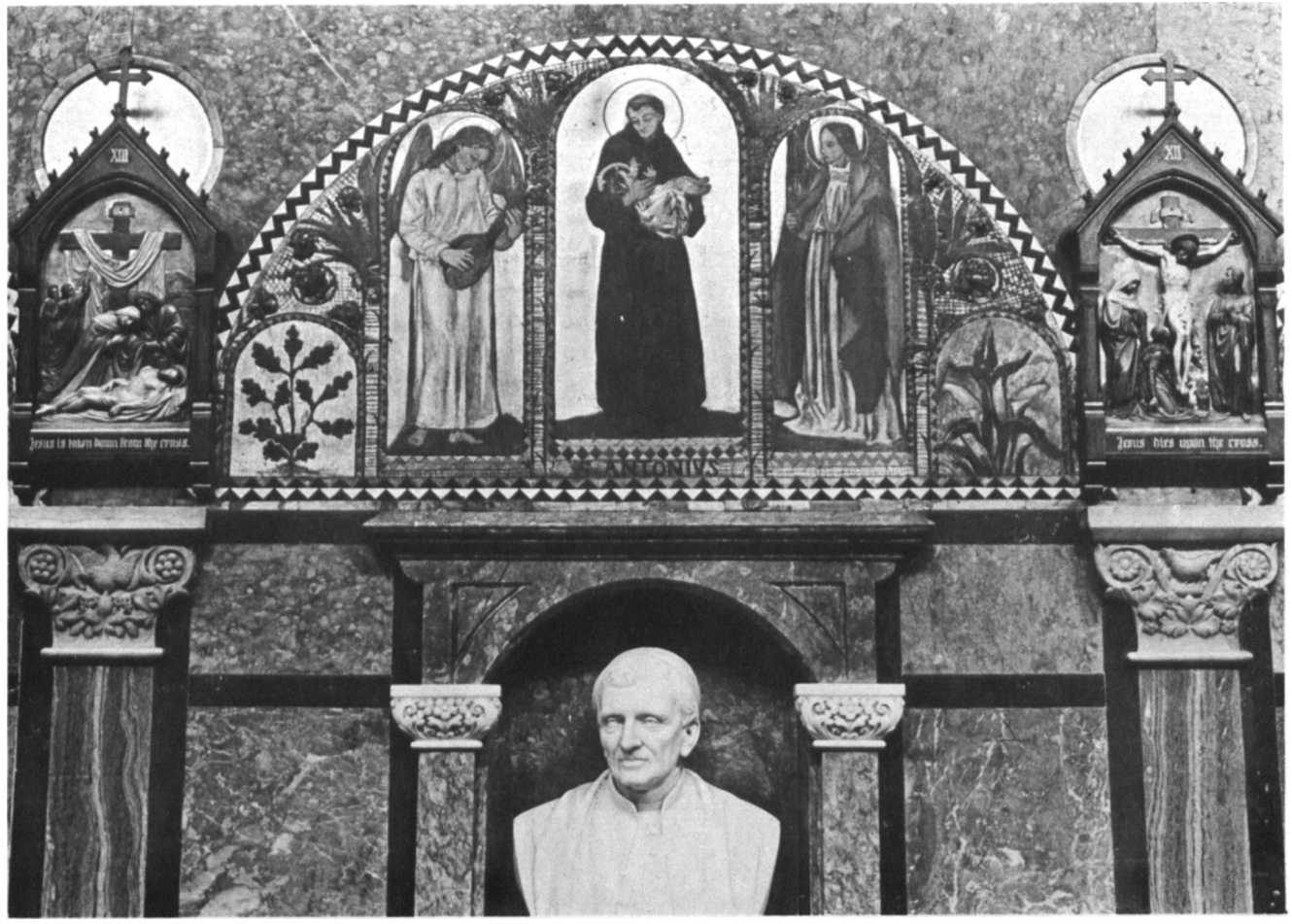

Plate 2 *Right walls lunette with St Anthony of Padua. Marble bust of Cardinal Newman by Michael Farrell of Dublin.*

Plate 3 Capital with vine motif, in the sanctuary.

Plate 4 The candlesticks.

apse, inspired by but not copied from the mosaic of San Clemente, so with the altar-frontal one feels a certain sense of familiarity. Was not its model to be found in one of the great basilicas of Italy? The precious stones and enamels in Sant'Ambrogio, Milan, is similarly composed. Its outline, though not its detail, springs to mind in front of Pollen's altar.

Upon the altar stand six tall candlesticks, their Byzantine shape entirely in keeping with the rest of the surrounding decoration. They are made, not of metal, which Newman could not afford, but of wood, gilded to look like metal. The base of each one is decorated with a leaf motif, hollowed out to look like cut metalwork. Pollen first drew the design for each of them on the mass of the wood and they were then carved by the carpenters employed on the site by the contractor, Mr Beardwood, of Westland Row. One of these men was given the task of making the pierced lattice panels which act as a screen on top of the choir gallery, another of the elements in the church which recalls the glories of St Mark's in Venice.

The excellent 'spirited' quality of the wood and stone carving in University Church was a matter of particular satisfaction to John Pollen. The work was done throughout not by fully-trained craftsmen who, in Pollen's words, 'would have attempted smoothness, and what they call finish, and so ruined the design', but by ordinary workmen who had 'little to unlearn'. The alabaster capitals of the pillars supporting the choir-gallery are fine examples of this carving. Each carried a design based on a plant form. The capital nearest the altar has grapes and ears of wheat. Others have shamrock, roses, acorns or oak leaves. The capital of the fifth pillar from the altar is particularly lovely, both for its finely-worked design of clusters of grapes and for the veining of the alabaster which gives it an attractive purplish blush. The designs of these capitals under the choir-gallery have particular reference to their position in the sanctuary and do not reappear elsewhere in the church. Along the walls of the nave, the capitals of the fictive pillars all have bird motifs. Each one is different and all are executed with spirit and finesse.

> '. . . the meaning of the whole bearing on the present or prospective interests of the Catholic University'.[22]

Besides the roof and the semi-dome of the apse, Pollen himself painted another important element of the decoration of this Church, the series of lunettes along the walls. In all, there are eleven lunettes, three on

the sanctuary wall opposite the choir-gallery and four on each side of the main body of the church. Each lunette has, in the centre, a standing saint with an angel on either side. Decorative foliage fills the lower corners. All the paintings have a gold-coloured background. This gold ground, the arched tops of the three compartments which fill each lunette and the particular style of the painting lend a medieval character to this work. Here, indeed, we have evidence of that community of interest which brought Pollen close to the pre-Raphaelite movement. The saints depicted in the lunettes were chosen for their relevance to this church as a University Church, built in this particular city at that date. In the sanctuary lunettes are two of the Patrons of Ireland, St Patrick and St Brigid, and the Patron of Dublin, St Lawrence O'Toole. On the right wall of the nave, beyond the pulpit, the series continues with St Dominic; opposite him, St Benedict, both of these founders of religious orders with a long tradition of scholarship; beside St Benedict, St Thomas Aquinas 'the father of scientific theology', teacher in the University of Paris; and opposite St Thomas, St Anthony of Padua, who taught for a time in the University of Bologna. Next to St Anthony stands St Philip Neri, founder of the Oratory; and opposite St Philip an Irish saint, Fiachra, who spent his life outside his own country, in France. The last two lunettes have Jesuit saints, Ignatius of Loyola, and opposite him one of his spiritual sons who had been martyred in India and had recently been beatified by Pope Pius IX, Blessed John de Britto.

> '. . . a beautiful and imposing structure, which was built simply out of zeal for the University, and which has given it a sort of bodily presence in Dublin'.[23]

This is Newman's Catholic University Church as he saw it, completed, in November 1856. Eighteen months had passed since he had signed the agreement for the land and started building. By May 1st, 1856, it had been possible to open and bless the church in the presence of the Archbishop of Dublin, Dr Cullen; the Archbishop of Armagh; the Lord Mayor of Dublin; and many other ecclesiastical and lay dignitaries. In the course of the following months the decoration was gradually completed. The marbles were installed, the lunettes painted and fixed in place, the large paintings from Rome stretched and hung on the upper walls in time for the opening of the new University session. Finally, Pollen painted the semi-dome of the apse. On November 9th Dr Newman celebrated the first Mass in the newly-finished Blessed Sacrament Chapel, and wrote to his friend, Ambrose

St John: '. . . the church is visible for the first time to-day and is magnificent'. But, only a few days previously, a new and alarming trouble had arisen – the wall of number 87 was 'coming down'. The first step towards solving this problem was to make the heavy buttressing which is visible along the lower part of the wall in the entrance passage to the church. A happier consequence was the provision of the porch. Although Pollen had suggested this earlier, Newman had held back because of the expense. Now it had become a necessity. Newman wrote to Pollen: 'The wall of 87 is coming down . . . please send by return of post if you can, a porch'. It was the last addition to be made to the church and was not completed until after Newman's withdrawal from Dublin.[24]

From start to finish the church cost a total of £6,000, instead of the £3,500 which it was estimated to cost at the outset. As Newman rather plaintively remarked: 'It is scarcely possible either to calculate or to control adequately the expenses of a building in progress.'[25] Newman bore this cost himself, paying £3,000 from the money which had been subscribed for his defence in the Achilli trial and finding the rest by going into debt. The difficulties and disappointments which he met in providing this church emerge clearly from Newman's correspondence. Looking back on these events, in 1896 Father William Neville, Newman's friend and constant companion in his later life, wrote: 'There are not many now alive who can have any idea of the anxiety which this Church brought upon him.'[26]

'I'm afraid I shall shock Pugin'.

The Catholic University Church is, in a very special sense, Newman's church. It is quite clear from all the sources that the basic ideas for both the building and the decorating of it were his.[27] What, then, was Pollen's role? It would seem that Pollen acted principally as interpreter and executant rather than as creator. His main work in the church, the semi-dome of the apse, may well have been his own idea. Not only does it reflect Flemish influences, to which Pollen and not Newman had been exposed, but we find Newman writing to Pollen on July 30th, 1856: 'should you feel a wish not to launch into your (giant) pictures, let us fit up the apse in some other way'. In the rest of the work he reveals himself as a very able and inventive designer, so steeped in the tradition which Newman wished to make live again that he perfectly interpreted the Rector's desires. The details of carved capitals, candlesticks, *baldacchino*, altar-frontal and reredos, all inspired by ancient forms, bear witness to his inventiveness as well as to his knowledge.

It is evident from the results achieved that the two men worked in close harmony. Indeed, when their work in Dublin was done, they remained life-long friends. But, had Pollen been given more freedom in decorating University Church, the result would almost certainly have been quite different. Judging by what we know of his taste at that time and as subsequently expressed in other decorative schemes, we might surmise that he would have given us a monument more in keeping with contemporary taste in England, probably with extensive evidence of the current vogue for Gothic ornament.

In Ireland also contemporary taste included a liking for the neo-Gothic. In Wexford, Gorey, Enniscorthy, Waterford and Killarney, as well as in Dublin, Churches, convents, chapels and cathedrals had been or were being built to the designs of Augustus Welby Pugin. Even more significantly, Pugin had worked on the new buildings for Maynooth College for a number of years prior to his early death in 1852. But this was Newman's Church, and the Gothic was not to his taste. When, in 1847, he formed the idea of building an Oratory church in Birmingham, Newman wrote to Dr Wiseman: 'I'm afraid I shall shock Pugin'. He was right. When the two men met in Rome Pugin's reaction to the project was that he would as soon build a Mechanics' Institute as an Oratory.[28] Newman expressed 'the greatest admiration of his (Pugin's) talents . . .' 'His zeal', he wrote, 'his minute diligence, his resources, his invention, his imagination, his sagacity in research, are all of the highest order.' But he strenuously avoided what he called the 'excesses of the ultra-Puginians'.

The other outstanding characteristic of contemporary taste in Catholic church building in Ireland was the neo-classical manner, a much subdued version of the Roman Baroque. Newly-built churches in Dublin in this style included St Audoen's (1841) and the Jesuit Church in Gardiner Street (1832). Newman's taste had its sources in Italy. Did he not write of his church: '. . . it may fairly give satisfaction, as no other example is to be found in this country in which the Italian idea is so strictly carried out . . .'? Why, then, did he not build his church in a style which would evoke memories of Philip Neri's Roman Oratory? Probably the answer cannot be provided merely by alluding to taste, and no doubt it is not a simple one. But perhaps some elements of that answer are to be found in Newman's own personality. In his effort to get back to sources, he had got back to Rome. But it was not the contemporary Rome of Pio Nono, nor the Baroque Rome of the Counter-Reform, rather the heroic, mystical Rome of the early centuries of Christianity. That is where, intellectually and spiritually, he belonged.

The University Church is a material expression of John Henry Newman's idea of a Catholic University. Perhaps it is also a reflection of the spiritual journey its creator had already accomplished.

1. F. McGrath, *Newman's University: Idea and Reality.* London, 1951, p.103 et seq.
2. Later (1873) published as *The Idea of a University.* Cf. McGrath, op.cit. pp.153-177.
3. Cardinal Newman, *My Campaign in Ireland, Part I: Catholic University Reports and Other Papers.* Aberdeen, 1896, pp.290-304.
4. W.P. Neville. Note on the University Church in *My Campaign in Ireland,* p.306.
5. *The Letters and Diaries of John Henry Newman*, edited by Charles Stephen Dessain of the Birmingham Oratory and Vincent Ferrer Blehl, S.J., Vol. XVI, London, 1965.
6. Neville, p.308.
7. To F.S. Bowles, June 23rd, 1855. *Letters and Diaries,* Vol. XVI. The exact situation of Newman's Church (behind number 87, not number 85) is incorrectly stated by C.P. Curran, 'John Hungerford Pollen and University Church', in *A Tribute to Newman*, ed. by Michael Tierney, Dublin, 1945, pp.207-231; reprinted in *Newman House and University Church*, published by University College Dublin (no date), and, following Curran, by McGrath, op.cit. p.405.
8. For biographical information on John Pollen and a sympathetic assessment of his work see Anne Pollen, *John Hungerford Pollen 1820-1902*, London, 1912.
9. Millais was at that time making copies of the stained-glass windows in the chapel in preparation for his painting *Mariana* (1851). On this episode and on Pollen's later connection with other members of the P.R.B. see T. Hilton, *The Pre-Raphaelites,* London, 1970. Pollen was already acquainted with W. Holman Hunt in 1851; see A. Pollen, op.cit. p.225.
10. *Letters and Diaries, Vol. XVI,* to Pollen 24/25 December 1854. Pollen's professorial duties included the delivery, at Newman's suggestion, of a series of lectures on Taste. These were followed, while University Church was being built and decorated, by a series on the Basilicas.
11. Newman, 'What I aimed at' in *My Campaign in Ireland*, p.294.
12. *The Month*, September 1906, p.319. Quoted by C.P. Curran, 1945, p.212.
13. A. Pollen, op.cit. p.380.
14. The gallery in the sanctuary is so narrow (6 feet) that one wonders how Newman envisaged installing an organ in it and yet having room for singers. On February 10th, 1856, he wrote to Pollen: 'It would be a *great* thing if the top of the organ was not over 15 ft. from the ground, so as not to interfere with the pictures - but this perhaps is impossible.'
15. On September 20th, 1856, he wrote to Pollen who was then working on the chapel of St Philip for the Birmingham Oratory: '. . . the idea is to draw the two ante rooms into the Sacristy by means of three Lombard or Saracenine arches (stilted), as they are seen in Sicily with small pillars, huge oblong upright tops *above* the capitals, and large bases. Sometimes there is the figure of a Saint within the said oblong'.
16. 'Architectural description of the University Church' in *The Catholic University Gazette*, No. 51, April 3rd, 1856.
17. *Ibid.*
18. The tapestries were woven in Brussels in the workshop of Bartholomeus van Aelst. Seven of the original cartoons survive and are now in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London. They were purchased at Genoa in 1623 for the Mortlake Tapestry Works founded by King James I. For most of the nineteenth century they were at Hampton Court. In 1865 they were transferred on loan to the South Kensington (now Victoria and Albert) Museum. Although the paintings in University Church have frequently been referred to, from Newman's time onwards, as 'cartoons', they are copied from the tapestries themselves, and not from the cartoons (which are, of course, in reverse).
19. The paintings are described as being in a different order by R. Wilson in *Newman's Church in Dublin,* Dublin, 1916. As far as can be judged from the photograph facing p.29 in C.P. Curran, *Newman House and University Church*, that order had still not been disturbed by the late 1940s. No doubt, their present order dates from their re-hanging after a recent cleaning. The cleaning failed to arrest or correct the darkening of the pictures, which may be due to the application of gutta-percha to the backs of the canvasses. See Newman's letter to Pollen October 16th, 1856.

20. *Letters and Diaries*, Vol. XVII, ed. by Charles Stephen Dessain, London, 1967. I am indebted to the late Father Dessain for his kindness in sending me a copy of the sketch which Newman appended to this letter, as well as some unpublished letters connected with University Church.
21. No. 54, July 3rd, 1856.
22. *Catholic University Gazette*, No. 51.
23. Newman, Report for the Year 1855-56, in *My Campaign in Ireland*, p.71.
24. At the time of going to press, further structural repairs are being carried out in the entrance passage to the church. Newman resigned his position as Rector of the Catholic University on November 14th, 1858, and did not again return to Dublin. The porch was paid for by Fr. W. Anderdon whom he appointed to succeed him as Chaplain of University Church. McGrath, op.cit. p.412.
25. Report for the Year 1855-56, loc. cit.
26. *My Campaign in Ireland*, p.308.
27. This conclusion disagrees with that reached by C.P. Curran.
28. Meriol Trevor, *Newman's Journey*, Glasgow, 1974, p.125.

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