

Newman conference focuses on life and legacy of one of Church's newest saints

This year's Anthony Jordan Lecture Series is celebrating the roots of Newman Theological College.

The 50th edition of the series – which coincides with the college's 50th anniversary – will focus on the man for whom the Edmonton school of theology is named, the recently canonized St. John Henry Newman, and will draw upon some of the leading Newman scholars from Canada and abroad, including Cardinal Thomas Collins, the Archbishop of Toronto. Collins is the former archbishop of Edmonton.

Ryan Topping, the school's vice president and academic dean, said the college sees it as “a particular sign of grace that our patron has also been raised to the altars in this our 50th year.” Newman was canonized by Pope Francis on Oct. 13, 2019.

“Our hosting a conference to celebrate Newman in this anniversary year is for us strategic,” said Topping of the March 20-21 event, calling it “a mark of our commitment, as we look to the next 50 years, to draw with renewed vigour upon the rich resources of Newman's thought and the Church's tradition.”



Ryan Topping

Besides Collins and Topping, among the scheduled speakers is Basilian Rev. Ian Boyd, founder and editor of *The Chesterton Review* and president of the G.K. Chesterton Institute for Faith & Culture at Seton Hall University in New

Jersey. Father Boyd recently retired to Edmonton.

The speakers will delve into Newman's contributions to philosophy, literature, the interpretation of Scripture, the New Evangelization and more, said Topping. But attendees can also expect to have their faith strengthened.

"Newman was among the greatest intellects of his day," said Topping. "Certainly he will be approached from an academic point of view, but as organizers we very much wish this event to encourage the faith of those who are coming to Newman for the first time."

The London, England-born Newman was raised an Anglican before he was received into the Catholic Church in 1845. Ordained to the priesthood in 1847, he would go on to author some 40 books on conscience, religious liberty, Scripture, the vocation of lay people, the relation of Church and State and more that would be influential in shaping Second Vatican Council documents a century later.

The new saint's spirit and teachings has loomed large in the Catholic Church, in particular in academia. He called for an educated laity "that could give an account of the reasons for its hope in Christ, for a laity that would not be seduced by the hollow promises of secular philosophy," said Topping.

To have Collins return to Edmonton, where he served as archbishop and chair of the college's board of governors before coming to Toronto in 2007, "is a gift to us," said Topping.

"Collins actively strengthened and promoted the college and seminary during his tenure among us. It is therefore an honour for us to be able to share in this love of Newman together," he said.

Collins sees many parallels between Newman's time and the modern age.



Cardinal Collins

"From my own perspective as a bishop particularly I'm thinking of higher education. I'm thinking of the issue of secularism. I'm thinking of the way Christians can speak in the modern world in a way that's not so abstract but actually touches people's hearts," said Collins. "He didn't have so much power. He had influence. I think that works much better now than power."

It can be seen in Catholic higher education, he said, which has been in a freefall since 1967 when university leaders at the Land O' Lakes Conference issued a statement declaring the independence of Catholic universities from "authority of whatever kind, lay or clerical, external to the academic community itself."

"That was the beginning of the end for Catholic higher education," said Collins.

The cardinal has been reading Newman since his high school days, and said we need to continue to mine his thought.

"He's more effective and fruitful than he ever was. We need him. We need Newman," he said.

For his part, Topping will tackle how Newman can teach us about the New Evangelization, the subject of an upcoming book he has written.

Newman Theological College was founded in 1969 when Edmonton Archbishop Anthony Jordan, the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, the Franciscan Fathers of Canada and the theology faculty of St. Joseph Seminary decided to combine their resources to form the college dedicated to theology and related disciplines.

-With files from Grandin Media