

John Henry Newman's *Idea of a University* (1852): Why Should a Christian University Exist?

"A man may hear a thousand lectures, and read a thousand volumes, and be at the end of the process very much where he was, as regards knowledge. Something more than merely *admitting* it in a negative way into the mind is necessary, if it is to remain there. It must not be passively received, but actually and actively entered into, embraced, mastered. The mind must go half-way to meet what comes to it from without."—"Discipline of the Mind: An Address to the Evening Classes" (1858)

Exploratory Questions

1. Can one have a unified curriculum of study in the university? Why and/or why not?
2. Should the university be exclusively or even primarily about teaching? What role should research play?
3. What role should theology play in the modern university?
4. What is the relationship of the various academic disciplines within the university?
5. Should knowledge be justified? Should academic study be justified?
6. What kind of person (if any) should the university produce?
7. What relationship should university education have to vocational training?
8. What relationship should a Christian university have to the Church?
9. Likewise, what responsibilities does the Church have toward the Christian university?
10. Are some particular models of Christ and culture better than others in modeling what a Christian university should look like?

Short Outline

Preface: Teaching and research are two separate institutions; Intellectual reform has different agendas than moral reform; university education is independent from yet needs the Church; intellectual development is about learning to analyze and master bodies of knowledge

Discourse I—Introductory: Along with appeals to Irish and Irish Catholic sensibilities, Newman argues that university education is based on natural (rather than supernatural) ends.

Discourse II—Theology a Branch of Knowledge: Sets up the next three discourses by arguing for the legitimacy of theology as a branch of knowledge, i.e. an academic discipline in its own right. Since the *university* is concerned with the *unity* of knowledge, to leave out theology is omit one of the discourses of human understanding. Problem with those who reduce religion to sentiment and moral feeling, it destabilizes religion and secular understanding. Newman includes a summary set of passages on what Christians have typically meant by God, as well as why God cannot be reduced to nature.

Discourse III—Bearing of Theology on Other Knowledge: Knowledge is holistic, but the various sciences (i.e. disciplines) cannot be dogmatic for they supplement each other; they are each partial pictures. Newman pictures a university that denies human agency as a kind of absurdum scenario. If God is the source of the natural and social worlds, then the study of theology cannot be excluded. Newman includes another passage setting forth the comprehensiveness of God.

Discourse IV—Bearing of Other Knowledge on Theology: Without the study of revealed religion, the other disciplines seek to expand their fields of knowledge and encroach on other fields. (see chart for details.)



Discourse V—Knowledge Its Own End: Discourse five represents the center of Newman’s argument. Liberal arts education has a particular tradition which embodies a classical atmosphere and method which in turn cultivate a particular kind of student: the “gentleman,” that is the person with a formed intellect. This tradition is neither concerned with practical learning or religious instruction per se. Instead, its goal is to form a particular orientation and approach to knowledge.

Discourse VI—Knowledge Viewed in Relation to Learning: The next three discourses now seek to further distinguish liberal arts knowledge from other kinds of education. University education should be about teaching the relationships between the disciplines and being able to see and understand the parallels and connections that make knowledge a unity.

Discourse VII—Knowledge Viewed in Relation to Professional Skill: Unlike the utility of career training, university education should be about the mind disciplined for its own sake. Liberal arts education does have a utilitarian aspect for it can train the learner for any number of vocations.

Discourse VIII—Knowledge Viewed in Relation to Religious Duty: University education is concerned with cultivating a particular kind of reasoned thinker. Religious instruction (i.e. catechism) is concerned with imparting a particular mastery of canon truth. The moral philosophy of the eighteenth-century is a poor substitute for this. In the last analysis, the gentleman learner is a product of natural civilization not divine grace.

Discourse IX (Conclusion)—Duties of the Church toward Knowledge: The Church must have jurisdiction over the university lest the later become a rival of the former. Liberal knowledge tends to replace revelation and drift from the truth in its temptation towards self-sufficiency. Likewise, the cultivation of the beautiful can become a false substitute for the faith itself. The natural sciences and the classics of literature each have their own temptations: the former to an inductive secularism when left to itself; the later as a record of human sinfulness. The Church is to purify any truth.

Section 9 (Epilogue): The example of St. Philip Neri

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“Lord Bacon gives us both the fact and the reason for it. Physical philosophers are ever inquiring *whence* things are, not *why*; referring them to nature, not to mind; and thus they tend to make a system a substitute for a God. Each pursuit or calling has its own dangers, and each numbers among its professors men who rise superior to them. As the soldier is tempted to dissipation, and the merchant to acquisitiveness, and the lawyer to the sophistical, and the statesman to the expedient, and the country clergyman to ease and comfort, yet there are good clergymen, statesmen, lawyers, merchants, and soldiers, notwithstanding; so there are religious experimentalists, though physics, taken by themselves, tend to infidelity; but to have recourse to physics to *make* men religious is like recommending a canony as a cure for the gout, or giving a youngster a commission as a penance for irregularities.

“The whole framework of Nature is confessedly a tissue of antecedents and consequents; we may refer all things forwards to design, or backwards on a physical cause. La Place is said to have considered he had a formula which solved all the motions of the solar system; shall we say that those motions came from this formula or from a Divine Fiat? Shall we have recourse for our theory to physics or to theology? Shall we assume {300} Matter and its necessary properties to be eternal, or Mind with its divine attributes? Does the sun shine to warm the earth, or is the earth warmed because the sun shines? The one hypothesis will solve the phenomena as well as the other. Say not it is but a puzzle in argument, and that no one ever felt it in fact. So far from it, I believe that the study of Nature, when religious feeling is away, leads the mind, rightly or wrongly, to acquiesce in the atheistic theory, as

the simplest and easiest. It is but parallel to that tendency in anatomical studies, which no one will deny, to solve all the phenomena of the human frame into material elements and powers, and to dispense with the soul. To those who are conscious of matter, but not conscious of mind, it seems more rational to refer all things to one origin, such as they know, than to assume the existence of a second origin such as they know not. It is Religion, then, which suggests to Science its true conclusions; the facts come from Knowledge, but the principles come of Faith.”-- *Tamworth Reading Room* (1841)

Discourse IV

Discipline	Without theology, it tends to. . .
Visual Art	Act independently of revealed ideals and resume a pagan symbolism
Music	Be tempted to use religion rather than minister to it
Architecture	Use divine (i.e. Gothic) forms as an end rather than a means
Natural Sciences	Left to themselves can deny revealed truths, such as the human soul
Economics	Forget that the science does not lead to virtue or even human happiness
Philosophy of History	Exclude revealed sources of history
Antiquities	Attempts to make history the sole judge of whether doctrine is correct.
Others	Cf. sec. 13 last paragraph.

“Science gives us the grounds or premises from which religious truths are to be inferred; but it does not set about inferring them, much less does it reach the inference;—that is not its province. It brings before us phenomena, and it leaves us, if we will, to call them works of design, wisdom, or benevolence; and further still, if we will, to proceed to confess an Intelligent Creator. We have to take its facts, and to give them a meaning, and to draw our own conclusions from them. First comes Knowledge, then a view, then reasoning, and then belief. This is why Science has so little of a religious tendency; deductions have no power of persuasion. The heart is commonly reached, not through the reason, but through the imagination, by means of direct impressions, by the testimony of facts and events, by history, by description. Persons influence us, voices melt us, looks subdue us, deeds inflame us. Many a man will live and die upon a dogma: no man will be a martyr for a conclusion. A conclusion is but an opinion; it is not a thing which *is*, but which *we are* "certain about;" and it has often been observed, that we never say we are certain without implying that we doubt. To say that a thing *must* be, is to admit that *it may not* be. No one, I say, will die for his own calculations; he dies for realities. This is why a literary religion is so little to be depended upon; it looks well in fair weather, but its doctrines are opinions, and, when called to suffer for them, it slips them between its folios, or burns them at its hearth. And this again is the secret of the distrust and raillery with which moralists have been so commonly visited. They say and do not.”—*Tamworth Reading Room* (1841)