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NEWMAN'S IDEA OF THE UNIVERSITY AND THE SUPERNATURAL

Ideas make history. They change man's political fortunes apart from changing his intellectual preferences. Although all ideas are offered as truths, not all meet the test of history, let alone of careful scrutiny. What Newman said on the idea of a university has been scrutinized by many, although often only because Newman said well what he said. Style and witticism have their own dubious credentials. But even when Newman's statements were studied for their intrinsic value, it was often overlooked that Newman's plea for the best possible cultivation of the natural capabilities of man was, here too, a piece with his visceral commitment to the supernatural. This was most logical on the part of one for whom nature was decidedly a fallen nature even in its noblest manifestations, or in man's intellectual endeavors. The idea of a secular university was in his view part of fallen human predicament. The idea of a Catholic university could not therefore be argued except with an eye on the supernatural as its redeeming factor. Those who disagree with this presentation of Newman's idea of a university will hurtle against a systematic series of Newman's emphatic statements. Only by ignoring them can they create the impression that they are not in conflict with Newman. However, impressions leave intact intrinsic truth. The shortchanging of truth entails, in turn, fateful consequences. But first Newman's statements.

On May 10, 1852, as the first Rector of the nascent Catholic University of Dublin Newman delivered the first of six lectures he was to give in four more weeks. Between July 21 and November 20 he composed three more lectures on the same subject. The nine lectures appeared in March 1853 as *Discourses on the Scope and Nature of University Education*. Between 1854 and 1858 he composed and delivered ten more lectures on much the same subject. All the nineteen lectures are contained in what Newman

prepared in 1873 for publication under the title *The Idea of a University Defined and Illustrated*. They all are part of the Doubleday Image Book edition (first issued in 1959), possibly the most widely used edition of one of Newman's five great books, an edition used here as the point of reference.

The additional ten lectures leave intact the principal and most ignored vein running through the original set of nine lectures, which are of concern in this essay. The vein in question stands for the reality of the supernatural order as the ultimate and supreme guiding rule for what is to be said about university education. That in spite of the nature of that vein, the book itself has become a classic shows much of the perennial value of whatever Newman said, especially in a sustained manner.

Classics are often read with little regard for the author's original message. Classics are the possession of a humanity which instead of reading them chooses to read into them ever more volatile preoccupations. This is certainly true of what is being thought and taught nowadays about education. Our times are hardly intent on encountering in *The Idea of a University* that vein so grippingly expressive of the supernatural. Worse, that vein has been increasingly neglected by too many ordained (as well as disordered or disoriented) mouthpieces of the supernatural. Newman's words attesting that supernatural vein will, however, stand. To help them stand out is the purpose of this essay and at a time when education is in shambles and references to the supernatural are not welcome at all even in educational circles officially committed to it. The former condition is surely the sad predicament of the secular academe, whereas aversion to the supernatural has become a distinctly Catholic plight.

On reading *The Idea of a University* and savoring the natural flow of its exquisite prose, one would hardly suspect that for Newman it was a torture to write it. Writing in general and writing books in particular was an invariable trial for him, a point he asserted again and again to his correspondents. In October 1852, when he was completing the book, his strength had just been drained by a number of afflictions, of which the Achilli trial was particularly burdensome. There were problems with the building of the Oratory in Birmingham as well as strains within the community. In reporting, on October 22, 1852, to Imelda Poole, (who converted before Newman did and afterwards entered a convent) about his latest visit with his physician, Newman disclosed the low level of his "vital powers," as he put it. The doctor told him that his brain and his nerves might not bear the stress and that a stroke could be imminent. "Mischief," Newman wrote, "might take place at any time—and that nothing can keep me up but tonics."¹

¹ *Letters and Diaries*, vol. 15, p. 183.

In that letter Newman also reveals the connection of all this with his writing of books, but especially the latest of them, *The Idea of a University*. "I feel the truth of what he [the doctor] says. The first book I wrote, my 'Arians' I was almost fainting daily, when I was finishing it—and (except my Parochial Sermons) every book I have written, before and since I was a Catholic, has been a sort of *operation*, the distress has been so great. The Discourses, now (thank God) all but finished, have been the most painful of all." He was still to write the *Grammar of Assent*, which was to be for him a trial of twenty years or so.

But surely it was not a trial for him to keep in sight that vein with telling references to it as he wrote those Discourses. The supernatural was Newman's lifeblood so to speak and he converted only because he wanted to remain attached to its only genuine and legitimate channel as ordained by God himself.² Yet a cursory look at the very first discourse, an introduction to the rest, may not encourage one to expect significant references to the supernatural in the rest of the book. Newman in fact makes several points in the introductory lecture that would seem positively to discourage such an expectation. He states that partly because of his own background he will have in mind such a notion of the university which was born in a Protestant or rather in a secular matrix, which is very much confined to the natural level of things. Of course, he defends the long-standing practice of the Church to make full use of all pagan learning. But this merely means that the natural is not in opposition to the supernatural, however distinct from it. In fact it is not the supernatural itself which Newman vindicates with soaring references to that most supernatural institution, the Apostolic See and the Vicar of Christ occupying it, as he urges that the wishes of that See should be taken by all Catholics for a command. A Catholic University in Dublin must therefore be a project which all should support with unstinting zeal and unwavering confidence. After all, so Newman reminds faculty and students alike, "All who take part with the Apostle, are on the winning side."³

Almost two years before he delivered the introductory lecture, Newman had already given a gripping portrayal of the papacy's victorious vitality in its phoenix-like rise, as if from the ashes, from the blows inflicted on it by the French

² For details, see ch. 1, in my *Newman to Converts: An Existential Ecclesiology* (Tinckney, Mich: Real View Books, 2001).

³ J. H. Newman, *The Idea of a University* (Doubleday Image Books, 1959), p. 57. Subsequent quotations from this book will be specified in the text as coming from this or that chapter in it and will not be endnoted.

Revolution and by Napoleon in particular. Newman did so in the lectures he had delivered under the general title, *Anglican Difficulties*, in London in the spring of 1850. Those difficulties derived for the better-grade Anglicans known as Anglo-Catholics from the fact that contrary to their wishful thinking the Church of England was a product of merely natural forces and considerations. And as Newman pointed out in the second discourse, "Theology as a Branch of Knowledge," on the idea of a university, the early infiltration of Lutheranism into the Church of England predisposed ever larger number of Anglicans to take religion for sentiments rather than for a set of doctrines. The process was reflected in what the English expected from their universities. Religion was still to be part of the program of instruction, but only as a means of shaping one's moral sentiments, and not as a tool to shape one's mind. In fact the philosophies in vogue in England ever since Hume opposed any notion that one could know anything about that pivotal object of religion which is God: "If you are not sure," Newman asked his audience, that God is different from nature, "how do you differ from Hume or Epictetus?"

Of course, the question was rhetorical, though in its deeper relevance something most serious. For only if God was different from nature, could He reveal to man anything supernatural. A plethora of revealed items came into view as Newman described the God of monotheism, a topic for natural reason. Newman began indeed with propositions that man could know by mere reason about God, such as that He was an "Individual, Self-dependent, All-perfect, Unchangeable Being" and similar characteristics of His. These included in Newman's listing even the propositions that "with an adorable never ceasing energy [God] implicated himself in all the history of creation, the course of the world." But no worldly philosopher, no philosopher who had not been touched by Christian revelation, would ever say that reason could also know that God similarly implicated himself "in the origin of society, the fortunes of nations, the action of the human mind."

With this last expression Newman wanted to suggest far more than that the action of the mind bespeaks a non-material soul, which as such is a powerful pointer to the existence of God. No, he claimed that man can know that his mind has been impacted again and again by God, and that man could know also about similar interventions by God in the origin of society, and its fortunes. About such a knowledge Newman, if pressed, would have had to add that it had a supernatural provenance. Thus seventeen years before Darwin explicitly reduced man and man's history to the action of a strictly natural selection, Newman implicitly, though fearlessly

declared that the supernatural was at work in natural human history, an anathema to Darwinians then as now. One can therefore easily guess what Newman would have said about the gurus of our times who speak of the clash of civilizations as replacing the clash of military and economic powers.⁴ He would note their aversion to the word "culture" and lay bare their reasons for it. Unlike civilizations, cultures connote the idea of cults, which in turn brings up questions about God as the sole logical objective of cultic exercises.

One could only wish that Newman had made use of the word "supernatural." Of course, he was speaking to an audience that had not the slightest doubt about the reality of the supernatural. One could not expect of Newman that he would warn in advance all his future readers that only by being fully aware of the difference between the natural and the supernatural could one read accurately all that he was to say in *The Idea of a University* about the teaching of theology as a legitimate and indispensable part of the proper functioning of a university. But he knew that his audience contained some who held for pragmatic reasons that even a Catholic university, though urged and sanctioned by the Apostolic See, should not bother with theology. Then as now there were Catholic intellectuals, who thought that a Catholic university fulfilled its missions once it equipped its students with purely professional skills.

In dedicating that book of his to his many friends in all parts of the world, including North America, Newman could not foresee the burgeoning, unparalleled since the Middle Ages, of Catholic institutions of higher learning in the United States, nor the fact that after hundred or so years of flourishing as Catholic universities, most of them would largely cease to be Catholic except in name and that some of them would officially delete the word "Catholic" from their legal designation. Although he was not afraid of speaking of the coming of the Antichrist in the guise of highly cultured naturalism,⁵ Newman would have hardly expected, confident as he was of the guiding role of the "Schola theologorum" in the Church, that the same School would eventually become a subtle promoter of naturalism in theological disguise. Newman could not even foresee the rise of modernism within the Catholic Church shortly after his death. He would have needed direct revelation from God to foresee that a hundred years later the "Schola theologorum" would do pretty much

⁴ Such as S. Huntington in his *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996).

⁵ See Newman's "The Patristical Idea of Antichrist in Four Lectures," in his *Discussions and Arguments on Various Subjects* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1897).

what has been done by a handful of modernists, although in a reverse direction. The modernists simply debased the supernatural to the level of the natural, whereas the "Schola theologorum" or the Catholic "Schools of Theology" of our times have for some time been intent on raising as much as possible the natural to the level of the supernatural. Even square dancing and moccasin may be turned there into a sacrament. Perhaps they are sacramentals, but such differences are mere verbalisms for some cultivators of the "new" theology.

The process has eaten itself through the very fabric of the Church as a structure. If one can claim in one of the most prestigious Pontifical Universities in Rome, and almost with impunity, that even the Catholic Church has failed as a Church as did all the other Churches, surely there remains no ground for speaking about the supernatural. On the natural level it should seem easy to understand that there remains no ground for doing mathematics if the multiplication table can be cast aside. Similarly, there remains no ground for doing medicine if the circulation of the blood need no longer be taken seriously. Many in the "Schola theologorum" fail, however, to understand, or do not wish to understand what should be similarly obvious: There remains no ground for speaking of the supernatural and there remains no reason for a "Schola theologorum" either, if its members should be reminded as a body that belief in the divinity of Jesus, this most supernatural of all such propositions, is the sole ground of their existence, and, far more importantly, of the existence of the Church. The document "Dominus Jesus" is a monumental reminder addressed to the "Schola theologorum" about that elementary connection. Its most elementary nature is in turn the tragic aspect of that document. Any purely natural professional institution would be crumbling if it needed a corresponding reminder about the basics. Only the Church, and only because it is divine, can afford the sad luxury of issuing such a reminder.

Happy times, one would say of the 1850s, when even such a somber mind as Newman would not dream of such a reminder ever to come. While he never for a moment had an illusion about the world, he rejoiced on registering, as he did in his *Anglican Difficulties*, that he could not remember times when the cohesion of Catholics had been so strong as in his day. Otherwise he would not have taken up in his third lecture on the idea of the university a topic, the bearing of theology on other branches of learning, about which there is much incoherence in Catholic academic circles. Instead of incoherence one may indeed register what is perhaps even worse, a total vacuum. For no other word is appropriate if one considers two points.

One is that by theology Newman meant natural theology, the other is that natural theology was largely banished from the syllabi of Catholic colleges and universities just at the time when they started dreaming about becoming institutions similar to Harvard, Yale, and Princeton. The place of hatching that dream was Land O'Lakes, the date July 23, 1967.⁶

The rest is history, or the practical de-Catholicization of most Catholic colleges and universities in the United States.⁷ Or more specifically, what happened was that Catholic colleges and universities have been sanitized of the supernatural and with profuse references to a new perception of the natural as the breeding place of something higher. In this process ample references were made to Newman and to his idea of the university, although once more shibboleths flew around in the air rather than solid information presented about what Newman said in his *Idea of a University*. The position paper that came out of Land O'Lakes did not contain passages from Newman's book, let alone those that have been and still will be quoted here.

Newman's third conference on that idea should have given second thoughts to the protagonists of the program of raising the level of Catholic higher institutions to the level of Harvard, or rather to lower them to that level, when measured in the very warnings of Newman about the best English universities of his day. In that third conference Newman argues first a purely logical point, namely that no subject can be properly discussed in severance from its broader foundations. Otherwise the effort is a mere farce, a sham, intellectually as well as morally. And since the broadest and deepest foundation can only be had with an attention to the ground of being and truth, which is God, natural theology is an absolute must in a place which calls itself the "universitas studiorum." The strictures which Newman levels at Oxford, Cambridge, and the new University of London for their banishing of natural theology from their curricula are fully applicable to what happened in

⁶ Reprinted in *American Catholic Higher Education: Essential Documents, 1967-1990* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992), pp. 7-12. A saving grace in this book of 448 pages is the paucity there of references to Newman, but the absence in its lengthy index of the words "revelation" and "supernatural" speaks louder than words. For the background and impact of the Land O'Lakes statement, see G. Rutler, "Newman's Idea of a Catholic University," in S. L. Jaki (ed.), *Newman Today* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), p. 108.

⁷ See J. F. Crosby, "Secularization in Catholic Colleges and Universities in the United States," in *American Society of Church History*, 153rd Annual Meeting, Dec. 27-30, 1992, Washington D. C., and J. T. Burtchaell, *The Dying of the Light* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1998).

Catholic universities trying to be other Harvards, Yales, and Princetons. They did so by doing what these had perpetrated as they turned, whether in practice or in theory or both, their departments of theology into departments of religious studies. While such departments readily accommodated all views on religion, they had no room for religious truths. In the same chapter Newman also excoriates those Catholics who expect a Catholic university to give professional skills and nothing more.

But Newman, steeped as he was integrally in the supernatural, would have contradicted his innermost urges had he included only natural propositions as he described natural theology in that conference. For Newman went far beyond the powers of natural theology when he ascribed to it the ability to unfold the workings in nature of a "most loving Providence." He did so at a time when Tennyson in his *In Memoriam* coined the phrase, "a nature red in tooth and claw," and Darwin started working on the *Origin of Species*, a work born in part out of his surrender to the undeniable reality of inconceivably vast amounts of suffering in the world of the living. Logic alone should have warned Newman that he most naturally slipped into supernatural theology as he spoke of a "most loving Providence" in nature.

At any rate, the final question in that conference made no secret of Newman's train of thought and bent of mind: "If this science [of natural theology] even as human reason may attain to it, has such claims on the regard, and enters so variously into the objects, of the professor of universal knowledge, how can any Catholic imagine that it is possible for him to cultivate philosophy and science with due attention to their ultimate end, supposing that system of revealed facts and principles, which constitutes the Catholic faith, which goes so far beyond nature, and which he knows to be most true, be omitted from among the subjects of his teaching?" A brief perusal of the syllabi of the "religion" courses given at Catholic colleges and universities during the last thirty years may convince anyone, except the wilfully blind, that the system in question has indeed been omitted. At the same time Catholic undergraduates, raised on the technique of "color it yourself" catechisms and therefore ignorant of the basics, were instructed, say in the abstruse differences between the views of the young and the old Melanchthon. Undergraduates equally unfamiliar with the Gospels were taught about the Gospels' origin from the mythical logions of Jesus. Professors of universal, that is, "catholic" knowledge, claimed to know all about "catholic" truth, but actually knew little about what is "Catholic."

In the next conference, "On the Bearing of Other Branches of Science on

Theology," Newman begins with excoriating those Catholics who go along with the basic claim of the world, of their general culture, that science and revelation are in irreconcilable conflict. Newman quickly turns the tables on the champions of that claim by pointing out that it generates in the world of learning a mad rush for facts at a disregard of their intrinsic relevance and a heedless collecting of views regardless of whether they are true or not. Then he turns to the craze for specialization and to the rising of specialists to the level of universal authorities. What he says of the ploughboy's competence to judge the work of a Prime Minister is surely applicable to our Nobel laureates who are pontificating on all topics wholly disconnected with their narrow competence.

It is almost painful not to extend similar observations of Newman's to our present culture, but here it is the boldly regular entry of the supernatural into Newman's discussion of that bearing that should retain our attention. To begin with, he is most intent on not identifying styles of past Christian ages with the supernatural. The gothic art, powerfully revived in England and France in his day, Newman refuses to take for *the* Catholic art in architecture. Not for him to take past habits for modern exigencies. He is truly catholic but only because he is Catholic and therefore is in possession of standards independent of the flow of times.

Hence he is able to take a long view on political economy, that is, capitalism. He is not afraid to quote the words of Leo the Great, on the hoarding of riches as sheer sin. Nor is Newman afraid to remind his Catholic audience about Christ's words concerning man's duty to care for riches that neither moth nor rust could devour. This is the perspective of the supernatural, which only one with Newman's supernatural courage would dare today to bring to the attention of Nobel economists and to editors of the *Wall Street Journal* and similar organs for whom the supreme standard is financial incentive. Newman would repeat to them: "Political economy must not be allowed to give judgment in its own favor but must come before a higher tribunal." And with such a courage Newman might not refrain from chiding Catholic admirers of neocapitalism who claim that with his encyclical *Centesimus annus* John Paul II changed the teaching of the *Rerum novarum* of Leo XIII and, for good measure, that of the *Quadragesimo anno* of Pius XI as well.

The same Newman was not afraid to warn all professors unwilling to include Catholic theology in their purview: "Supposing theology be not taught, its province will not simply be neglected, but will be actually usurped, by other sciences, which will teach without warrant, conclusions of their own in a subject matter which needs

its own proper principles for its due formation and disposition." He meant theology, and not its insipid substitute into which it has been turned in recent decades. He in fact referred to Thomistic theology as the discipline which secular academics would read into his words. Instead of apologizing, he challenged them to let theology emancipate itself from the shackles imposed on it by secular academia and now by its Catholic counterpart, so fearful of the supernatural.

Newman's next conference, "Knowledge its own end," is both an encomium and a damning of liberal education. This is so because Newman grants knowledge to be its own end, but not its supreme end. For Newman would be the last to overlook the fact that man's supreme end consists in his supernatural salvation. Thus he grants that the aim of liberal education is to produce gentlemen, but this is not the same as to be Christian and Catholic: "It is well to be a gentleman, it is well to have a cultivated intellect, a delicate taste, a candid, equitable, dispassionate mind, a noble and courteous bearing in the conduct of life." But Newman adds, fifteen lines later, his most devastating indictment of a purely natural culture: "Quarry the granite rock with razors, or moor the vessel with a thread of silk, then may you hope with such keen and delicate instruments as human knowledge and human reason to contend against those giants, the passion and the pride of man."

Yet, Newman so keen on the abysmal reality of original sin, would not be surprised that it was still possible to claim and by one who prided himself to be a Catholic Newmanist, that by being a gentleman one lived up to Newman's ideal of what was the aim of a Catholic university to produce. He would consider this strange view of his thought as being another effect of original sin. The world of natural reason could speak of *Pride and Prejudice*, but it took a mind, such as Newman's steeped in the supernatural, to warn about the immense dangers which *Pride and Passion* pose to human culture in general and to Catholic culture in particular.

Pride and Passion stand, much more than *Pride and Prejudice*, for moral perspectives, which, with Newman, always evoke the perspective of the supernatural. A proof of this is the thrust of his next conference, "Knowledge Viewed in Relation to Learning." Even the specific cast of what he says, the rise of universal education in England against the "public," that is, private schools and universities, has an eerily modern ring, partly because he viewed both in their service to knowledge and learning. The new education quickly ended up in the service of learning at the detriment of knowledge or intellectual discernment.

Today it is no longer possible to say with Newman that one could still debate

whether the new educational systems would not "produce a generation frivolous, narrow-minded and resourceless." Only the word "resourceless" should be replaced by "disoriented," because the educational product, or the educated youth in question is very resourceful in promoting its purely pecuniary interest and has little interest in anything else. "Education is a high word," or a noble word, Newman stated, but education, in its pristine sense is of no interest to that supremely clever youth or to its teachers. These would not, except perhaps under the threat of death, tell their charges that certain patterns of their behavior are strictly immoral. Should they be concerned about rebuke if they have for president, say, one who is a leader in biochemistry but who had from the start decided upon having children without ever having a husband? No room there for speaking of the importance of role models in education as distinct from techniques to impart skills.

Newman never tried to shore up morals by denouncing the immoral and the amoral. Rather he always aimed at energizing the morals of the believer. Here too his real broadside was aimed at Catholics, who had conformed to the spirit of the age, in this case to that of Victorian England, "with its hollow profession of Christianity and a heathen code of ethics." A fearfully winning combination in Newman's eyes, because it could issue in natural excellence, which, with "its succession of heroes and statesmen, of literary men and philosophers, of men conspicuous for great natural virtues, for habits of business, for cultivated tastes, for accomplishments," made England what it is and succeeded "to domineer Catholics." Clearly, Newman's thrust was not that Catholics should excel in natural virtues as much as they could, but that natural virtues were far from enough to implement the purpose of a true university. If true, that university had to be Catholic and its purpose supernatural for all its commitment to natural lore of all possible kinds.

Only with this in mind can one understand Newman's agitated attack on Locke's theory of education in the next discourse, "Knowledge viewed in relation to professional skill." Locke, who provided modern England with its ideology of sheer pragmatism couched in high-flying words, could therefore only be a panegyric on usefulness. Newman's attack on Locke is worded in his rephrasing John Davison, an older colleague of his in Oriel College, into whose works Newman could not look without sensing how close he was to Catholicism. Newman compared Davison in this respect to the famed Bishop Butler of Durham, his philosophical hero. At any rate, had Newman not been driven by the supernatural, he would

have hardly attacked Locke, whom he otherwise often praised for his moderate views in epistemology.

This keen sense for the supernatural which appears only indirectly in that discourse, blares forth in full force in the next, which is on "Knowledge Viewed in Relation to Religious Duty." This is all the more telling, because Newman now heaps encomiums on the refining effect which the proper cultivation of the intellect has on man's thinking, conversation, and comportment. The intellectually shaped individual is for Newman the gentleman who would never inflict pain on others. He is the *beau ideal*, the paragon of consummate courtesy. He is one in whom the urges of the senses have been subdued by the mind. Such an individual would be, Newman claims, most positively disposed toward, if not the dogmatic system of Catholicism, at least toward its "system of pastoral instruction and moral duty."

Surely Newman paints in the best possible light that intellect refined by the best use of natural reason and learning when he presents him as sympathetic to such tenets of that system as "the ruined state of man, his utter inability to gain Heaven by anything he can do himself; the simple absence of all rights and claims on the part of the creature in presence of the Creator; the illimitable claims of the Creator on the service of the creature; the imperative and obligatory force of the voice of conscience; and the inconceivable evil of sensuality." This is as generous an attitude toward nature as one can imagine on the part of an integral supernaturalist.

But Newman would not have been a real supernaturalist had he not added most serious provisos. For he does not see a real difference between the noble pagan of old and the best pagan of modern times. The modern pagan is a full replica of the old whose chief complaint about the Christian message, the Church, or true Catholicism was that "it spoke of tears before joy, a cross before a crown; that it laid the foundations of heroism in penance, that it made the soul tremble with the news of Purgatory and Hell." These are, one would say today, the words of a "conservative" insensitive to the dictates of nature, to a truly complete "catholic" perspective. Well, they were the words of one committed to a thorough super-naturalism as embodied only in Catholicism. He had already said: "Catholicism is one whole and admits of no compromise or modification." This is a far cry from the message of that disreputable *Catholicism*, which as a most widely used textbook in Catholic campuses for several decades, deprived countless undergraduates of even the vestiges of their Catholic faith.

Newman had already said that the purpose of the discourse was to give "some

portions of the outline... of the religion of civilization, and to determine how they lie to those principles, doctrines, and rules which Heaven has given us in the Catholic Church." The upshot was a balance, in one scale of which Newman put the gentleman, in the other the saint who was no less educated than the one who just remained a gentleman. About the gentleman he said, in sum, that even in his day the gentleman was the product of civilization and not of the Church. Tactful, whenever he could be, Newman did not refer to any of his contemporaries, although he knew many who were just gentlemen, and some who, he was sure, were saints walking on earth. Among the latter was Dominic Barberi, an astute mind as well in Newman's estimate. For illustrations Newman went back to earlier centuries, where he found Gibbon and Lord Shaftesbury in one scale and Saint Francis de Sales and Cardinal Pole in the other. A thousand years farther back in history Newman found Emperor Julian and Saint Basil, both of whom received the same classical education in the same school in Athens.

Now a liberally educated Catholic who remained just a liberal would object that Newman drew too exaggerated a contrast. Newman would not have protested, though adding a note. He resorted, he would say, to the "extreme" so that his audience and his future readers might not miss the point. Liberals almost always do. In their misconstrued liberality they are generous for almost everything, except, and almost invariably, for the supernatural. They have surely misconstrued Newman's *Idea of a University* and proved once more the fearsome extent to which scholarship can make myopic its devotee. Learned editions of that book are a case in point⁸ as well as elaborate discourses on Newman's educational views, of which a principal one has Newman's phrase, "imperial intellect" for its title.⁹

Authors of such books carefully eschew the string of Newman's statements quoted in this essay. They also fail to recall that Newman's was also a very imperious intellect when it came to defending the rights of the supernatural. Hence his

⁸ Thus the one by I. T. Ker (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976) as well as essays by various authors attached to the edition by Yale University Press (1996).

⁹ By A. D. Culler (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1955). Culler, who discusses every possible intellectual factor that formed Newman's educational views, largely omits the influence which immersion in such supernatural factors as biblical salvation history as well as Church history, and especially his fondness for such saints as Athanasius and Ambrose had on the formation of those views. The point stressed in this essay is not visible in F. McGrawth's *Newman's University: Idea and Reality* (London: Longmans Green, 1951).

emphatic endorsement of the Curia as the arm of the imperial function of the papacy. To submit to it was in his view a chief religious duty of the truly Catholic intellect.¹⁰ No wonder that this passage was carefully skirted by some Catholic promoters of Newman's ecclesiology as recast in Anglican terms.¹¹

In view of all this, one can almost anticipate the points and the thrust of Newman's concluding lecture on "Duties of the Church towards Knowledge." The points were about the various branches of learning or rather about the different duties of the Church toward each. The differences were dictated derived from the subject matter of each of those branches. Mathematics was to be left alone as something wholly "atheistic." Physical science was a different matter. In speaking of the age-old hostility and jealousy between religion and physical philosophers, Newman naturally recalls the name of Galileo and reports the general view of the conflict: "Not content with investigating and reasoning in his own province, it is said, he went out of his way directly, to insult the received interpretation of Scripture; theologians repelled an attack which was wanton and arrogant; and science, affronted in her minister, has taken its full revenge upon theology since."

Thirty years later Newman, whom old age allegedly made mellow, was far more outspoken. He did so in the long preface which he wrote to the Longmans edition of perhaps the most important work he wrote as Anglican, his essays on the *Via Media*. In discussing there the duty of the true Church to trace the right way for the faithful, Newman took for illustration the Church's condemnation of Galileo and he defended it without mincing words.¹² What he said there stands in shocking contrast to the flow of apologies which so many Catholics on so many echelons began to offer on the four-hundredth anniversary of Galileo's birth in 1964. In the many manifestations of a "contrite Catholicism" toward the great Pisan, who felt he had a divine mission to save the Church from a debacle, I nowhere found that passage of Newman's, although readily available. It seems that a "broadened" Catholicism systematically narrows its scope of reading.

This takes us to the most remembered section of the concluding discourse, the section on literature. In referring to differences of opinion of "zealous and religious Catholics," Newman chose sides, the liberals' side, one would be tempted to say. He did not want to eliminate any real piece of literature from the range of studies in a

¹⁰ See *The Via Media and the Anglican Church* (London: Longmans Green, 1897), vol. 1, p. xl.

¹¹ See on this my *Newman's Challenge* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2000), pp. 177-78.

¹² See *The Via Media*, pp. liv-lvi.

Catholic university. He stated that a Catholic university was educating Catholics for the rough and tumble of the "civilized" world, and that it was not a convent, nor a seminary. Yet he would also say that it could not have in its dormitories house rules favorable to promiscuity, in imitation of secular universities that condone all forms of self-expression. He would not have concurred that Catholic undergraduates at America's oldest Catholic university be left free to learn what pornography is from its most salacious promoter. Did Newman not speak of the unspeakable evil of sensuality? Since undergraduates coming to that university are no longer required to have read Newman's *Idea of a University* just before their freshman year, they may perhaps be excused on account of ignorance, which is not to be construed as an invincible one. Their teachers can hardly be excused on that score. An intellectual, Arthur Koestler used to say, cannot plead ignorance.

At any rate, a Catholic university still has for its principal aim to produce well-educated Catholics that are fully alive to their religion as "the only safe religion," to recall a phrase of Newman's.¹³ Being fully alive to that religion means some measure of dedication to the task of holiness and Newman was possessed of such a dedication to a heroic degree. His *Idea of a University* came to a close with his paean on Saint Philip Neri. A year and a half earlier Newman cried out in London: "Be my soul with the saints!"¹⁴ and still four years earlier he wrote to Henry Wilberforce, who eventually was to convert: "I have ever made consistency the mark of a saint."¹⁵ Newman was thoroughly consistent in holding in focus the supernatural, this sole channel of sainthood, as he discussed the idea of a university. Those and only those who are alive to this point will see the relevance of that book to the gist of the message of *Ex corde ecclesiae*.

The papal document quotes *The Idea of a University* three times. It insists with Newman that reason and faith equally serve the cause of truth. It asks with Newman that all knowledge imparted in a Catholic University be made part of a higher synthesis. Finally it points out with Newman that education must aim at forming habits of thought and comportment. The document would have more directly met the problem it tried to remedy had it used any or several of Newman's insistences, quoted in this essay, on the embedment of the university and above all of the Catholic university, in the supernatural. Apparently, those who advised the pope on Newman's

¹³ From a letter of Newman's from 1882, which is also one of the mottos of my *Newman to Converts*.

¹⁴ *Anglican Difficulties*. See my edition (Real View Books), p. 259.

¹⁵ See my *Newman to Converts*, p. 51.

Idea of a University, had read it with only one eye open. As to Newman, one could only wish that he had spoken not so much of revelation as of the supernatural. The latter word is much stronger than the former and certainly in our times when within the Church a trend has grown robust to speak so much of the natural and so little of the supernatural.

Those Catholic educators who are resolved to ignore the supernatural in its undiluted form, will keep ignoring the vein of gold which brilliantly witnesses to the supernatural in *The Idea of a University*. They, though boastful of their standing as intellectuals, also ignore Newman's impassioned exclamations about the intellect, by which they set so great a store, exclamations in the concluding part of the *Apologia*, a work of Newman's which many non-intellectuals have also read. There Newman rephrases in his own words the words of his and their Master as echoed by the Church: "Ye must be born again," is the simple, direct form of words which she uses after her Divine Master; "your whole nature must be re-born, your passions, and your affections, and your aims, and your conscience, and your will, must all be bathed in a new element, and reconsecrated to your Maker, and, the last and not the least, your *intellect*"¹⁶ (italics added). But they are far more intent on reforming the Church than on working on their self-reform which remains the sole genuine form of any reform.

No wonder that they have found it natural to resist that papal encyclical on the specious ground that application to local exigencies demand "careful" considerations, which merely serve the purpose of avoiding the implementation of a plain command. Newman would tell them: "Time is short, eternity is long," the very last and crowning phrase in his *Development*. There is no better guideline than that phrase for developing, for maturing into a full Catholic, with or without university education, let alone with the help of dubiously Catholic universities.

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¹⁶ *Apologia pro vita sua* (Doubleday Image Books, 1956), p. 325.