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Classics*

John Henry Newman

The Uses of Knowledge

EDITED BY LEO L. WARD, C. S. C.

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JOHN HENRY NEWMAN

The Uses of Knowledge

SELECTIONS FROM
THE IDEA OF A UNIVERSITY

EDITED BY
Leo L. Ward
UNIVERSITY OF NOTRE DAME

New York

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MANUFACTURED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
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Principal Dates in Newman's Life

- 1801 Birth, London, February 21.
- 1816 Entered Trinity College, Oxford.
- 1821 Made Fellow of Oriel College, Oxford.
- 1824 Ordained in the ministry of the Anglican Church.
- 1828 Made Vicar of St. Mary's, the University Church, where his sermons soon attracted a large following. His sermons showed the increasing tendency toward traditional doctrine and practice.
- 1841 Published Tract 90. This was perhaps the high point of what has come to be known as the Oxford Movement, an attempt on the part of Newman and a group of Oxford friends to bring the Church of England back to more traditional doctrines and practices. The Tract was widely read and created new tensions and dissensions in the Anglican Church. Somewhat later Newman gave up his position in Oxford and retired to Littlemore, where he remained, with a small group of friends, in virtual retreat.
- 1845 Professed faith in the Roman Catholic Church, and, a year later, was ordained in Rome.
- 1852 After returning to England and establishing a religious house in Birmingham, delivered in Dublin a series of nine lectures in connection with plans for a new Catholic University. These lectures later became, in book form, the first main section of *The Idea of A University*.
- 1854 Appointed Rector of the Catholic University in Dublin, and delivered the ten lectures which became the second main section of *The Idea of A University*.
- 1858 Retired from the Rectorship, after meeting delays and difficulties, and misunderstandings on the part of authorities in Ireland.
- 1864 Wrote his autobiography, *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*.
- 1879 Made Cardinal by Pope Leo XIII.
- 1890 Died, August 11, at religious oratory near Birmingham.

Introduction

Education seems to have some special importance for Americans. From the earliest days the little log school was looked upon as an indispensable institution in every pioneer community. Since then our educational establishments have grown amazingly in every region of the country, and yet they always seem to remain inadequate to meet the demand. Clearly knowledge must have some special importance or value for the American mind.

But what is its value? Why do we seek knowledge? What is its utility? We do not seem to have reached any general agreement about the answer to the question. This book presents an answer by John Henry Newman, first made in a series of lectures over a hundred years ago, and later published in a book that has since become a literary and educational classic. *The Idea of A University* was composed of two main sections, the first of which was entitled "University Teaching," and the second, "University Subjects." In the first section of the book Newman developed the essential outline of his views on university education. Of the nine lectures which made up this first section of the book, the last four are reprinted here, under a new title, *The Uses of Knowledge*. From the second section of the book three passages have been added here, in Appendices, to suggest certain amplifications of his thought made by Newman in some of his later lectures.

Because the book from which these four lectures are taken is integrated very closely, as a whole unit of thought, no complete view of Newman's meaning can be grasped from any of the parts. Each of his main ideas, to be fully and justly comprehended, must be seen in the context of the whole book. For this reason the broad scheme of Newman's thought has been

presented in a "General Argument." The student is urged to give particular attention to this digest, in order to provide himself with a framework of reference for the study of the four lectures included in the present book. With the help of this General Argument, it is hoped that the student will be able to see these four lectures in their true relationship to the whole of Newman's thought.

Some readers may wish to go back to *The Idea of A University* in order to see Newman's argument in its complete elaboration. The four lectures which are reproduced here will abundantly reveal his special ability to elaborate and qualify his ideas with a rich texture of precise detail. In this lies some of the peculiar strength of Newman's thought, and one of the special excellences of his style. The reader who becomes aware of this distinction of thought and expression will be led back to the whole book, fully assured of the reward to be found in a complete statement of a great idea.

Why are we seeking knowledge? What is its value? Its utility? If we as students are really concerned, we shall find in Newman's book a very suggestive answer to these questions.

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GENERAL ARGUMENT IN THE IDEA OF A UNIVERSITY

*Brief excerpts stating the essential notions contained in
the Preface and the first nine Discourses*

PREFACE

“The view taken of a University in these Discourses is the following:—that it is a place of *teaching* universal *knowledge*. This implies that its object is, on the one hand, intellectual, not moral; and, on the other, that it is the diffusion and extension of knowledge rather than the advancement. If its object were scientific and philosophical discovery, I do not see why a University should have students; if religious training, I do not see how it can be the seat of literature and science.

“Such is a University in its *essence*, and independently of its relation to the Church. But, practically speaking, it cannot 10 fulfil its object duly, such as I have described it, without the Church’s assistance; or, to use the theological term, the Church is necessary for its *integrity*. Not that its main characters are changed by this incorporation: it still has the office of intellectual education; but the Church steadies it in the performance of that office.”

DISCOURSE I

INTRODUCTORY

“The views to which I have referred have grown into my whole system of thought, and are, as it were, part of myself. Many changes has my mind gone through: here it has known 20 no variation or vacillation of opinion, and though this by itself

is no proof of the truth of my principles, it puts a seal upon conviction, and is a justification of earnestness and zeal. Those principles, which I am now to set forth under the sanction of the Catholic Church, were my profession at that early period of my life, when religion was to me more a matter of feeling and experience than of faith. They did but take greater hold upon me, as I was introduced to the records of Christian Antiquity, and approached in sentiment and desire to Catholicism; and my sense of their correctness has been increased with
30 the events of every year since I have been brought within its pale. . . . Let it be observed, then, that the principles on which I would conduct the inquiry are attainable, as I have already implied, by the mere experience of life. They do not come simply of theology; they imply no supernatural discernment; they have no special connexion with Revelation; they almost arise out of the nature of the case; they are dictated even by human prudence and wisdom, though a divine illumination be absent, and they are recognized by common sense, even where self-interest is not present to quicken it; and, therefore,
40 though true, and just, and good in themselves, they imply nothing whatever as to the religious profession of those who maintain them. They may be held by Protestants as well as by Catholics. . . . I have no intention, in any thing I shall say, of bringing into the argument the authority of the Church, or any authority at all; but I shall consider the question simply on the grounds of human reason and human wisdom. I am investigating in the abstract, and am determining what is in itself right and true."

DISCOURSE II

THEOLOGY A BRANCH OF KNOWLEDGE

"Religious doctrine is knowledge. This is the important
50 truth, little entered into at this day. . . . I am not catching at sharp arguments, but laying down grave principles. Religious

doctrine is knowledge, in as full a sense as Newton's doctrine is knowledge. University Teaching without Theology is simply unphilosophical. Theology has at least as good a right to claim a place there as Astronomy."

DISCOURSE III

BEARING OF THEOLOGY ON OTHER KNOWLEDGE

"If the various branches of knowledge, which are the matter of teaching in a University, so hang together, that none can be neglected without prejudice to the perfection of the rest, and if Theology be a branch of knowledge, of wide reception, of philosophical structure, of unutterable importance, and of supreme influence, to what conclusion are we brought from these two premises but this? that to withdraw Theology from the public schools is to impair the completeness and to invalidate the trustworthiness of all that is actually taught in them. . . . In a word, Religious Truth is not only a portion, but a condition of general knowledge." 60

DISCOURSE IV

BEARING OF OTHER KNOWLEDGE ON THEOLOGY

"If you drop any science out of the circle of knowledge, you cannot keep its place vacant for it; that science is forgotten; the other sciences close up, or, in other words, they exceed their proper bounds, and intrude where they have no right. For instance, I suppose, if ethics were sent into banishment, its territory would soon disappear, under a treaty of partition, as it may be called, between law, political economy, and physiology; what, again, would become of the province of experi- 70

mental science, if made over to the Antiquarian Society; or of history, if surrendered out and out to Metaphysicians? The case is the same with the subject-matter of Theology; it would be the prey of a dozen various sciences, if Theology were put out of possession; and not only so, but those sciences would be
 80 plainly exceeding their rights and their capacities in seizing upon it. They would be sure to teach wrongly, where they had no mission to teach at all. . . . The human mind cannot keep from speculating and systematizing; and if Theology is not allowed to occupy its own territory, adjacent sciences, nay, sciences which are quite foreign to Theology, will take possession of it. And this occupation is proved to be a usurpation by this circumstance, that these foreign sciences will assume certain principles as true, and act upon them, which they neither have authority to lay down themselves, nor appeal to
 90 any other higher science to lay down for them."

DISCOURSE V

KNOWLEDGE ITS OWN END

(Reprinted here, as I)

DISCOURSE VI

KNOWLEDGE VIEWED IN RELATION
TO LEARNING

(Reprinted here, as II)

DISCOURSE VII

KNOWLEDGE VIEWED IN RELATION
TO PROFESSIONAL SKILL

(Reprinted here, as III)

DISCOURSE VIII

KNOWLEDGE VIEWED IN RELATION
TO RELIGION

(Reprinted here, as IV)

DISCOURSE IX

DUTIES OF THE CHURCH TOWARDS
KNOWLEDGE

“I have been . . . inquiring what a University is, what is its aim, what its nature, what its bearings. I have accordingly laid down first, that all branches of knowledge are, at least implicitly, the subject-matter of its teaching; that these branches are not isolated and independent one of another, but form together a whole or system; that they run into each other, and complete each other, and that, in proportion to our view of them as a whole, is the exactness and trustworthiness of the knowledge which they separately convey; that the process of imparting knowledge to the intellect in this philosophical way is its true culture; that such culture is a good in itself; that the knowledge which is both its instrument and result is called Liberal Knowledge; that such culture, together with the knowledge which effects it, may fitly be sought for its own sake; that it is, however, in addition, of great secular utility, as constituting the best and highest formation of the intellect for social and political life; and lastly, that, considered in a religious aspect, it concurs with Christianity a certain way, and then diverges from it; and consequently proves in the event, sometimes its serviceable ally, sometimes, from its very resemblance to it, an insidious and dangerous foe. . . .

“Liberal Knowledge has a special tendency, not necessary or rightful, but a tendency in fact, when cultivated by beings

such as we are, to impress us with a mere philosophical theory of life and conduct, in the place of Revelation. . . . Truth has two attributes—beauty and power; and while Useful Knowledge is the possession of truth as powerful, Liberal Knowledge is the apprehension of it as beautiful. Pursue it, either as beauty or as power, to its furthest extent and its true limit, and
120 you are led by either road to the Eternal and Infinite, to the intimations of conscience and the announcements of the Church. Satisfy yourself with what is only visibly or intelligibly excellent, as you are likely to do, and you will make present utility and natural beauty the practical test of truth, and the sufficient object of the intellect. It is not that you will at once reject Catholicism, but you will measure and proportion it by an earthly standard. You will throw its highest and most momentous disclosures into the background, you will deny its principles, explain away its doctrines, re-arrange its
130 precepts, and make light of its practices, even while you profess it. Knowledge, viewed as Knowledge, exerts a subtle influence in throwing us back on ourselves, and making us our own centre, and our minds the measure of all things. This then is the tendency of that Liberal Education, of which a University is the school. . . .

“The book of nature is called Science, the book of man is called Literature. Literature and Science, thus considered, nearly constitute the subject-matter of Liberal Education. . . . Let her (the Church) do for Literature in one way what she
140 does for Science in another; each has its imperfection, and she has a remedy for each. She fears no knowledge, but she purifies all; she represses no element of our nature, but cultivates the whole. Science is grave, methodical, logical; with Science then she argues, and opposes reason to reason. Literature does not argue, but declaims and insinuates; it is multiform and versatile: it persuades instead of convincing, it seduces, it carries captive; it appeals to the sense of honour, or to the imagination, or to the stimulus of curiosity; it makes its way by means of gaiety, satire, romance, the beautiful, the pleasurable. Is it

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which they exercise upon those whose education consists in the study of them. I have said already, that to give undue prominence to one is to be unjust to another; to neglect or supersede these is to divert those from their proper object. It is to unsettle the boundary lines between science and science, to disturb their action, to destroy the harmony which binds them together. Such a proceeding will have a corresponding effect when introduced into a place of education. There is no science but tells a different tale, when viewed as a portion of a whole, from what it is likely to suggest when taken by itself, without the safeguard, as I may call it, of others. 30

Let me make use of an illustration. In the combination of colours, very different effects are produced by a difference in their selection and juxta-position; red, green, and white change their shades, according to the contrast to which they are submitted. And, in like manner, the drift and meaning of a branch of knowledge varies with the company in which it is introduced to the student. If his reading is confined simply to one subject, however such division of labour may favour the advancement of a particular pursuit, a point into which I do not here enter, certainly it has a tendency to contract his mind. If it is incorporated with others, it depends on those others as to the kind of influence which it exerts upon him. Thus the Classics, which in England are the means of refining the taste, have in France subserved the spread of revolutionary and deistical doctrines. In Metaphysics, again, Butler's *Analogy of Religion*, which has had so much to do with the conversion to the Catholic faith of members of the University of Oxford, appeared to Pitt and others, who had received a different training, to operate only in the direction of infidelity. And so again, Watson, Bishop of Llandaff, as I think he tells us in the narrative of his life, felt the science of Mathematics to indispose the mind to religious belief, while others see in its investigations the best : *allel*, and thereby defence, of the Christian Mysteries. In like manner, I suppose, Arcesilas would not have handled logic as Aristotle, nor Aristotle have 50

criticized poets as Plato; yet reasoning and poetry are subject to scientific rules.

- 60 It is a great point then to enlarge the range of studies which a University professes, even for the sake of the students; and, though they cannot pursue every subject which is open to them, they will be the gainers by living among those and under those who represent the whole circle. This I conceive to be the advantage of a seat of universal learning, considered as a place of education. An assemblage of learned men, zealous for their own sciences, and rivals of each other, are brought, by familiar intercourse and for the sake of intellectual peace, to adjust together the claims and relations of their respective
70 subjects of investigation. They learn to respect, to consult, to aid each other. Thus is created a pure and clear atmosphere of thought, which the student also breathes, though in his own case he only pursues a few sciences out of the multitude. He profits by an intellectual tradition, which is independent of particular teachers, which guides him in his choice of subjects, and duly interprets for him those which he chooses. He apprehends the great outlines of knowledge, the principles on which it rests, the scale of its parts, its lights and its shades, its great points and its little, as he otherwise cannot apprehend them.
80 Hence it is that his education is called "Liberal." A habit of mind is formed which lasts through life, of which the attributes are, freedom, equitableness, calmness, moderation, and wisdom; or what in a former Discourse I have ventured to call a philosophical habit. This then I would assign as the special fruit of the education furnished at a University, as contrasted with other places of teaching or modes of teaching. This is the main purpose of a University in its treatment of its students.

And now the question is asked me, What is the *use* of it? and my answer will constitute the main subject of the Dis-
90 courses which are to follow.