

Implications of John Henry Newman's
The Idea of a University
on Christian Scholarship: Discourses I-IV

1. The relationship of the Christian scholar and the idea and nature of the university. Is it primarily a place of teaching as JHN contends, whose goal is the intellectual rather than the moral formation of students, and whose chief concern is the diffusion and extension of knowledge rather than its discovery and advancement through research?

The issues here are twofold: (1) the issue of teaching vs. research as constituting the idea and nature of the university; (2) the issue of whether or not the university's concern is exclusively intellectual and separate from the moral and spiritual formation of students. JHN explicitly states that the university is a "place of teaching universal knowledge," and that its "object is . . . intellectual, not moral." Does the university exist primarily for the sake of students or for the sake of the sciences? Should research be relegated to various "academies" and the university, where students are present, to teaching? Is JHN guilty of an either/or fallacy: either teaching OR research; either intellectual OR moral? Could it be, should it be both? There are major research universities, where students are present; should teaching institutions also encourage research? (on the matter of moral education, see Arthur F. Holmes, *Shaping Character: Moral Education in the Christian College*, Eerdmans, 1991).

2. The relationship of the university to the Church.

JHN subordinates the university to the Church especially in three ways: (1) assistance; (2) integrity; (3) the steadying factor. It is easy for the university to fall into one of two fallacies: (1) the fallacy of becoming more of a church than a school in its emphasis on pietas; (2) the fallacy of rejecting the authority of the church in its emphasis on doctrina. How to strike a balance between pietas and doctrina; how to make sure the university or college fulfills its role as a school and not a church.

Another issue to consider is how thorough and complete should the Church's jurisdiction over the university be, especially in terms of academic freedom? Consider how Baylor U. distanced itself from the control of the BGCT. How should the ties that bind church and university together be articulated? 3.

Here is a key question for all aspiring Christian scholars: do you wish to be affiliated with a "secular," state, public college or university whose philosophy will be determined by a non-Christian Weltanschauung and whose goals will

be oriented toward the individual and public sphere; or do you wish to be affiliated with with a Christian and Church-related college or university whose philosophy will be determined by the Christian worldview and whose goals include service to the Church as well as the public square?

3. The relationship of the Christian scholar to both the activities of teaching and scholarship. Is it possible for the single Christian scholar to have the (1) ability, (2) time, (3) energy to do both? Consider this quote from JHN, p. 5:

“The nature of the case and the history of philosophy combine to recommend to us this division of intellectual labor between Academies and Universities. To discover and to teach are distinct functions; they are also distinct gifts, and are not commonly found united in the same person. He, too, who spends his day in dispensing his existing knowledge to all comers is unlikely to have either leisure or energy to acquire new.”

4. The importance and impact of liberal arts education on the Christian scholar, secondarily in terms of the development of courtesy, propriety, and polish, and primarily in that “it brings the mind into form.” See quote on pp. 8-9.

5. The importance of the difference between what JHN calls “viewiness” and true liberal arts education. Viewiness is nothing other than “brilliant general views about all things whatever” (p. 9; random theories, imposing sophistries, dashing paradoxes), whereas the results of true liberal education has to do with a “connected view or grasp of things,” and “the idea of science, method, order, principle and system; of rule and exception, of richness and harmony” via the study of grammar, mathematics, history, poetry, etc. (p. 9) leading to the largest and truest philosophical views.

6. The issue of the extent to which one’s philosophy of education is established upon the natural order, and the extent to which it must or may rest on divine revelation, but simply human reason and experience. 16-18.

But first things first: do you have a philosophy of education? Thinking through these issues is a prerequisite for Christian scholarship. Then the question of whether or not an adequate philosophy of education can be based on “nature” alone, or must begin with Scripture can be addressed. T. S. Eliot argues that one’s philosophy of education is a product of one’s philosophy of life. If a believer’s philosophy of life is based on Scripture, then so will one’s philosophy of education. JHN’s point, however, is indicative of the RCC approach to education in its layering of Christ and culture, and it also is the basis for their cooperation in the natural domain with many others and their ideas and contributions without misgivings, whereas biblical protestants would restrict their educational cooperation to some extent (greater or lesser) because of perceived biblical restrictions. Furthermore, one wonders about the credibility of basing a philosophy of education on human reason and wisdom, as if these were value free sources of thought and insight. All theorizing, including that about education, rests on

some kind of “control beliefs” (Wolterstorff). There is no pure reason or wisdom upon which education can be based, but will reflect some prejudice, the nature of which must well be determined.

7. What is a Christian scholar? A Christian scholar is a scholar who starts the scholarly process on the basis of the fact of the existence of God, presumably the Christian God, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and recognizes the epistemological implications of the existence of God in every conceivable discipline, in every conceivable knowledge enterprise. As JHN says, “Admit a God, and you introduce among the subjects of your knowledge, a fact encompassing, closing in upon, absorbing, every other fact conceivable” (p. 29). The first principle of the Christian scholar is unashamedly theistic. JHN, however, is clear that the God whose implications are epistemically significant is not to be conceived Deistically, but theistically--monotheism-- as his contrasts demonstrate (pp. 34-8).

8. JHN identifies the beginnings of the “scandal of the evangelical mind” in the redefinition of the facticity of the Christian religion as something rooted in feeling or sentiment. Originally, faith was an intellectual act, its truth objective, its result knowledge. But in the spread of Protestantism, faith was redefined as “a feeling, an emotion, an affection, an appetency” and as this view prospered, the connection between faith, truth, and knowledge was forgotten or denied. If religion or theology, then, is a matter of the “heart” and not the “mind,” then how could there be a place for it in a university which is devoted to the study of knowledge? 30-31.

The subtext here is that of modernity: what is knowledge according to the canons of modernism? Can anything that is arational or nonscientific be admitted into the kingdom of knowledge? The modern spirit was largely responsible for the exclusion of theology from the academy! With the advent of postmodernity and alternative ways of knowing besides the purely scientific and rational, then only NOW is the possibility of readmitting theology or religion back into the academy. The story told by George Marsden in *The Soul of the American University* documents this exclusion that JHN himself is discussing, not just of theology, but of Christian perspectives from the academy. But he makes a case, like Newman, for their readmission, esp. in the follow up volume, *The Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship!* Indeed, the Pew College Society stands in this Newmanesque tradition of recognizing the implications of the existence of God academically, the inconsistency of denying a hearing to Christian perspectives, and the campaign to readmit Christian viewpoints into the academy!

The notions of cultural relativism (the position of Mr. Brougham, p. 32) and the contention that religion is a matter of feeling (German, *Gefuhl*) not fact (so F. Schleiermacher and S. Kierkegaard, p. 33) is the primary reason for the exclusion of Christianity, Christian theology, Christian perspectives, and Christian scholarship from the academy, and the reason why only the assured results of reason and science were presumably admitted. Even in this context, the social or human sciences, *der Geisteswissenschaften*—

psychology, history, sociology, philosophy, etc—also had a hard time defending their claims to knowledge as well. Countless thinkers, Wilhelm Dilthey most notably, attempted to provide an epistemological method for the social sciences that they might be counted as knowledge. However, since the recognition of the paradigm-dependency of all ways of knowing, including the natural sciences, esp. due to the influence of Thomas Kuhn's book, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, the relativity of all knowledge claims has been recognized. If this is so, then even rational-empirical science is not as absolute and as objective as once thought. Hence, there may be room for other ways of knowing, even religious ones, since all knowledge partakes of the human factor.

9. The relationship of the Christian scholar to the epistemic status of theology as a branch of knowledge. JHN rests his entire case on the assertion that theology is not poetry, but knowledge, just as much as Newton's doctrine's of physics. Hence, his argument is the following:

A university as its name implies should teach universal knowledge.

Theology is a branch of knowledge.

A university, therefore, should teach theology (p. 25).

JHN constructs his argument from another angle as well: that the university is to serve students of every kind, even theological students, and to fail to teach theology is to fail these students (p. 26). This is not a very strong argument.

Christian scholarship brings Christian perspectives to bear on all academic subjects. When a christian scholar does this, is she doing so in the realm of knowledge or poetry/feeling/sentiment? What is your understanding of the epistemic status of Christian scholarship? If Christian theology whose content is brought to bear on scholarship is not knowledge, then is Christian scholarship rightly be excluded from the academy? Or should it, in a postmodern context, be permitted, but regarded as one more opinion and perspective, like all other so-called "knowledge" claims?

10. JHN mentions what may have been a second cause of the "scandal of the evangelical or christian mind": privatization. Because of the clear sacred/secular distinction between natural and supernatural subjects, and because the supernatural was excluded from the knowledge game, then those who were beginning to control the knowledge game "graciously" allowed those in religious culture to pursue theological knowledge "in private" and when they are "by themselves," as long as they did not bring such privatized knowledge, peculiar to their own minds, to bear on a comprehensive system of instruction (p. 41).

Hence, Os Guinness says: evangelical faith is "privately engaging, but publically irrelevant." Richard John Neuhaus says that we live in a "naked public square" when it comes to religion in public life (see his journal *First*

Things). Because religion is accepted only in the private, personal, and individual domain, it has been excluded from the academy without exception.

11. The Christian scholar must recognize the importance of the five following points:

1. Knowledge forms one unified whole insofar as the universe itself is intimately knit together, the many being brought together into a one.
2. Because of God's action and interaction upon the universe, it cannot be contemplated without contemplating God. Hence, the sacramental nature of the cosmos.
3. All the disciplines are connected together, aspects of things, incomplete in relation to things themselves, and thus need and serve each other.
4. The comprehension of the bearing of one science upon another and the use of each to each, etc., belongs to a distinct science, the science of sciences, which is Philosophy.
5. Given the unity of knowledge and the sciences, no one science can be omitted and knowledge be had; and granting that theology is a science, to omit it makes it impossible for the one who omitted it to call himself a philosopher because of its bearing on the whole of knowledge and the respective sciences. 45-6; see summary on page 51.

11. A third reason for the scandal of the evangelical mind is posited by JHN: the attitude that knowledge is the enemy of Christianity, and that if it is not arrested, it will destroy all that Christians hold dear and venerable (p. 58).

12. The Christian scholar will recognize that the truths of revelation and theology will greater impact on some disciplines, less on others. As JHN states, math will not suffer at all if theology be omitted; chemistry less than politics; politics less than history, ethics, and metaphysics. Yet to the extent that knowledge is unified and whole, then if the whole is impaired by an omission, then it is all affected (p. 58-9). Consider what E. Brunner called the law of closeness of relation:

- There is a hierarchial and structural relationship among the various subjects in liberal studies. There are those *inner, central studies* that concern God and human beings; there are those *outer, bordering subjects* that concern nature and symbols. The relationship of the inner, central studies to the outer, bordering subjects has been called by Emil Brunner the "*law of closeness of relation*" to the center of existence. First is humanity's relationship to God, then to himself, next in relation to nature, and finally to symbols where by human beings express themselves (logic, language, math). These latter symbolic disciplines are *basic studies*, but they are not *central studies* in terms of the law of closeness of relation.
- The closer anything lies to the center of existence, especially in humanity's relationship to God and to each other, the greater the disturbance of that order and the understanding of it by sin. The disturbance has been the greatest in theology, religion, and philosophy. The least amount of disturbance has been

registered in the areas of the exact sciences (biological and physical sciences) and formal sciences (grammar, logic, mathematics). The humanities and social sciences fall somewhere in between.

- Knowledge of each of these areas must be corrected by the principles of Christian faith. Hence, the activity of “integrating faith and learning” is a redemptive enterprise undertaken by Christian academic *doctors* who seeking to “heal” their disciplines and restore them to their proper theistic orientation in creation. Christian academics are just as responsible for the healing and health of the subjects which God has entrusted to them as medical doctors are for the healing and health of the patients that are entrusted to them. The *whole creation* must be restored and God has called Christian academic doctors to this significant task.
- The degree of correction or healing needed in a discipline is determined by the law of the closeness of relation. The impact of faith on learning is therefore on a corresponding gradient. In theology and religion, the need is total: it is no mere correction or healing that is needed, but complete substitution. The foundation and function of philosophy must be thoroughly revised as it must also be in the areas of the humanities and the social sciences. However, according to the law of closeness of relation, the functioning or practice of the exact and formal sciences need little if any correction or healing (except when it comes to the philosophic foundations and methodologies of these disciplines).
- According the law of the closeness of relation, the order of liberal studies is the following:
 - **Theology:** the study of theology is central in the Christian liberal arts college or university since humanity’s ultimate concern is God.
 - **Philosophy:** the study of philosophy comes next as the handmaiden of theology and as a discipline with its own tasks of ordering the various spheres of life and of providing the tools by which knowledge and wisdom are discovered, understood, and communicated. Philosophy aims to reflect on the presuppositions of human knowledge in epistemology; on the art of reasoning and thinking in logic; on moral virtues, human conduct and the meaning of human existence in ethics; on human self-expression in aesthetics; and on ultimate reality in metaphysics.
 - **Humanities:** the study of the humanities concerns the nature of human beings and their artifacts in the domains of history (national and political history; history of civilization), literature (drama, novel, essay, poetry), and the fine arts (painting, sculpture, architecture, music, dance, theatre).

- **Social Sciences:** the study of the social sciences concerns human nature and behavior in areas such as sociology, economics, political science, education, anthropology, and psychology.
- **Natural Sciences:** the study of the biological (zoology and botany) and physical sciences (chemistry, astronomy, geology, and physics).
- **Formal Sciences:** symbolic and basic studies of mathematics, languages, grammar and rhetoric, and logic whereby human beings quantify reality, communicate to each other, and understand their world.

12. JHN causes the Christian scholar to realize that if theology is not given its rightful place as the queen of the sciences, the science of science which organizes and explains all other sciences, then some other science, ill-suited to the task, will usurp the place of the theology as the final integrating discipline and reference point for the totality of knowledge. When this happens, then the entire edifice of knowledge is constructed in service to an idol, the idol of that substitute discipline (p. 59-60). JHN's argument is most important here:

If theology is excluded, "it would be the prey of a dozen various sciences" which would be "plainly exceeding their rights and their capacities in siezing upon it" {theology}. This discipline, whatever it may be, will become dangerous to religion for this reasoning: "that no science whatever, however comprehensive it may be, but will fall largely into error, if it be constituted the sole exponent of all things in heaven and earth, and that, for the simple reason that it is encroaching on territory not its own, and undertaking problems which it has no instruments to solve" (p. 60; cf. p. 62, 66).

What disciplines have taken the place of theology as the governing science? Natural sciences, linguistics, philosophy, fine arts-painting, music, architecture, political economy, history?

If theology is dropped from the curriculum, or simply set to the side as a sacred activity as opposed to the secular pursuit of knowledge, then the scholar/student is bound to pursue her scholarship and studies in service to an idol (see B. Walsh, R. Middleton, *Transforming Vision*, pp. 166-7). Christianity is only considered peripheral to the academic task, and only occasionally consulted (see 2 Kings 16: 15, where King Ahaz who sacrificed his sacrifices on a pagan altar, and employed the bronze altar of the Lord occasionally).