

Study and Reading Questions on John H. Newman's  
*The Idea of a University*

**Preliminary Issues:**

1. How does Newman as a Catholic, indeed, as a Aristotelian/Thomist, understand the relationship of reason and faith? Consult the first paragraph on xvi for help in answering this question.

Perhaps the following diagram will help in that it shows that for JHN, the university occupies the natural domain where reason rules and results in the production of the "gentleman" and a kind of natural or human happiness. On the other hand, the Roman Catholic Church occupies the supernatural realm of faith and generates the Christian and a supernatural happiness. The two realms are to be distinguished, though some overlap is inevitable. Now for a really important question: CONTRAST THIS THOMISTIC WITH THE AUGUSTINIAN UNDERSTANDING OF THE RELATIONSHIP OF FAITH AND REASON AND THE IMPACT ON THE NATURE AND CONDUCT OF UNIVERSITY EDUCATION.

RCC = Supernatural realm = Faith/Christ/Sacred = Christian

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Univ. = Natural realm = Reason/Culture/Secular = Gentleman

In your reading, you might detect some oscillation, even inconsistencies, on Newman's part in his understanding of faith and reason and their roles in university life.

**Discourse 1: Introductory**

2. According to JHN, what is the role of the university: teaching or research? intellectual or moral? 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? 3

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? Should teaching institutions also encourage research?

3. Why does or should a church found a university in JHN's opinion? 5

4. Can the self same person be both scholar and teacher? Why or why not according to JHN and YOU? 5

5. How does JHN describe the real cultivation of the mind and the benefits of the training and formation of the intellect? What are your favorite phrases in this discussion? 7-9

6. What does JHN mean by "viewiness" and how does he critique this notion? How does it compare with the results of a genuine liberal education? 9-10

7. What does JHN says is the philosophical basis and foundation of liberal education? Do you agree or disagree? Why does he start with the natural order rather than with revelation? 16-18. Refer to question #1 above for more on this issue.

### **Discourse 2: Theology as a Branch of Knowledge**

8. Outline JHN's basic line of argumentation for the necessity of including theology in the university curriculum. 25-28.

9. What kind of impact does the existence and knowledge of God have on the study of university subjects? 29-30 Why, however, does JHN reject Protestant and in particular, evangelical, views of Christianity and theology as inadequate? Is this the beginning of the "scandal of the evangelical mind" about which Mark Noll speaks in a book known by this title? 30-31

10. On pages 32-34, the "Fact vs. Values" distinction promoted by modernity is discussed. Is theology knowledge? Why or why not and what are the implications for the university? Why do most public universities NOT have theology departments? How is DBU distinct in this regard?

11. Discuss JHN's doctrine of God and how is it based in both natural and special revelation. What does JHN have to say about the deistic understanding of God and its implications? How does Hume and Epicurus fit into the discussion? 34-39

### **Discourse 3: The Bearing of Theology on Other Branches of Knowledge**

12. In JHN's understanding, what is knowledge, the unity of knowledge, divine revelation through knowledge, the interrelation of the sciences as the science of sciences, and the bearing of theology on knowledge and all the sciences? (entire chapter) What do you think Newman means by his assertion that religious truth is not only a portion, but a condition of general knowledge? 57 Is he betraying his Thomist view here of the relation between faith and reason?

### **Discourse 4: The Bearing of Other Branches of Knowledge on Theology**

13. Explain how JHN understands that the truths of revelation and theology will impact the disciplines differently. 58-60. What implications does this have on the endeavor to "integrate faith and learning"? Can it be done in all disciplines, even accounting, chemistry, grammar, etc.? If so, how? If not, why not?

14. What is the basis of Newman's notion that if theology is not taught, other disciplines will usurp its proper role and place? 59-60, 62ff How is this played out in the academy today? Which disciplines have served as theology's surrogate and what has been the outcome?

### **Discourse 5: Knowledge Its Own End**

15. Elaborate on JHN's discussion of the unity of knowledge and the danger of specialization, the value of being a member of a larger community of learning, and the generation of a philosophical habit of mind. 76-77

16. In what sense is knowledge its very own end according to Newman, and how does knowledge as an intrinsic end meet basic human needs? 78-79. Compare and contrast Newman's view to the views of Plato, Augustine, and Luther along these lines? Do you think Newman is right in this assertion? Is it biblical?

17. Compare and contrast the Ciceronian position on knowledge and the Catonian /Baconian ideal 79-80. In which camp do you stand? What about DBU as a university?

18. Unpack as many key ideas as you can in JHN's discussion of liberal arts education on pp. 80-83 in terms of definition, what it is and isn't, and so on. What famous Greek philosopher does JHN draw upon for his thinking in this regard? Note the distinction again between use and enjoy!

19. Discuss in some detail JHN's grand notion of "philosophy" or "science". What is the ultimate goal or ambition of philosophy or science? Is this like a 'worldview'? How does JHN's distinction between the two methods of education apply here? 83-85

20. According to JHN, what are the limits of education? What can and can it not do? Connect his understanding of its limits with his understanding of the relationship of reason and faith, the natural and the supernatural. Does Newman integrate or separate faith and learning? Or is the man confused? 89-91.

### **Discourse 6: Knowledge in Relation to Learning**

21. According to JHN, what terms best capture the essence of education, and what for him is the IDEA of a university? 91-93

22. How does JHN articulate the relation of this perfection of the intellect to mere knowledge in the balance of the chapter? In the process and more importantly, itemize as many insights as you can on Newman's understanding of "philosophy" (sounds like worldview here and there) as the end of a university education and cite as many quotes as you can (esp. on pp. 99-100; 101, 104-05; 109).

### **Discourse 7: Knowledge Viewed in Relation to Professional Skill**

23. What does JHN conceive the business of the university to be? 108-110

24. In his discussion and critique of the empiricist and pragmatist philosopher John Locke, explain how Newman understands liberal education to be "useful." 114-119.

25. What is the great but ordinary end of a university education according to Newman's great quote on 125-136?

### **Discourse 8: Knowledge and Religious Duty**

26. Discuss Newman's vast description of the "gentleman" as the intended outcome of liberal learning on p. 145ff. What is the connection between a gentleman and a Christian? Should the production of gentlemen and gentlewomen be a goal of Christian higher education? Why or why not? If so, how?

### **Discourse 9: Duties of the Church Toward Knowledge**

27. How does Newman understand the proper relationship between the Church (RCC) and the university? 147-149. What is your own understanding of this relationship, say between the Baptist church and DBU?

28. Why does Newman think there might be a tendency of the university to drift from its theological and ecclesial moorings? 149-152. What leads to the abandonment of Christianity by Christian scholars? Why is it that Christian spirituality is often neglected in Christian scholarship? How can this tendency be thwarted? JHN points out that university curriculum largely consists of the study of three books:

- a. The Book of God--theology.

- b. The book of nature--science.
- c. The book of man--literature

Hence, he wants to investigate the influence of religion on the last two because of their corrupting influence. Where does the corrupting influence come today?

29. How does Newman articulate the conflicted relation between science and religion? Is there ultimate agreement between these two disciplines and if so, why and how? What main issues does JHN address in the context of this discussion (Hint: 1. the two cultures 2. methodological naturalism or atheism; 3. academic freedom).

30. What kind of challenge does the study of literature pose to the purity of Christian faith? What remarks and suggestions does Newman make about the nature of literary study in the process?  
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