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Religious Education and John Henry Newman's Idea of a University

*Michele Marchetto**

Abstract: The aim of this paper is to outline the thinking of John Henry Newman (1801-1890) regarding religious education and how it relates to his idea of university. When he was called to Ireland by the Roman Catholic bishops to found a Catholic University in Dublin, he decided to make it a centre of a truly liberal education, that had as its main scope the formation of human minds in their own perfection. In this work the Catholic Church would have been called upon to warrant its character as a university, and to keep it faithful to its original idea. Newman knew very well that "Liberal Education makes not the Christian, not the Catholic, but the gentleman"; nevertheless he also believed that theology should not be excluded from the system of learning, because of its relationship to all the other sciences when establishing their respective areas of research. Although it has no pastoral mission, university education cannot renounce teaching theology and religious knowledge. The Catholic University goes one step further: in fact, it is Catholic if it professes the Roman Catholic creed, that is, if it cultivates its students' Catholic morals and faith under the Church's protection.

Keywords: Catholic university; philosophy; religious education; theology

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John Henry Newman and the Catholic University in Ireland: religious education and Liberalism

At the beginning of October 1851, John Henry Newman visited Ireland for the first time; on the 12th November the Committee for the University, that had been instituted specifically, appointed him “President of the Catholic University of Ireland”. Although he would have to wait three years for the formal courses to begin, the religious character of this enterprise, the blessing of Pope Pius IX and his own idea of exporting the *Alma Mater* of Oxford to Ireland involved Newman fully in this project, so that on the 12th May 1852, following the request of Paul Cullen (1803-1878), Archbishop of Dublin, he delivered the first of his discourses in Ireland¹.

The reasons why Cullen applied to Newman, are essentially two. Newman seemed to him to be an influential controversialist, especially after his *Lectures on Anglican Difficulties* (1850), where he strongly claimed the independence of the Church from the State, not without indicating, however, the way of conversion from Anglicanism to Catholicism. Cullen believed that Newman's powers of persuasion might support his campaign in favour of a completely Catholic education for Catholic Irishmen. Secondly, Cullen's farsightedness imagined that Newman's human and intellectual influence would give the University a peculiar character, one capable of overcoming the vicissitudes of the ages (Barr, 2003, p. 69): indeed, Newman brought with him a profound awareness of the historical and cultural origins of universities, in addition to his deep-rooted experience of life at college and of Oxford's tutorial system (McGrath, 1951, p. 115).

The struggle against religious Liberalism at the beginnings of secularization

When Newman accepted Cullen's proposal, he could not help recalling his own experience as an Anglican at Oxford, including his struggle against religious Liberalism, Latitudinarianism and Indifferentism, the most serious threats the “new era” posed, more to the Church of England, than to that of

¹ In the following four weeks Newman delivered four more of his lectures; after them he wrote five discourses never delivered in public. On the 2nd February 1852 (even if they were dated 1853), these ten discourses were published under the title of *Discourses on the Scope and Nature of University Education. Addressed to the Catholics of Dublin*. In 1873, after some changes, they would become the first part of the *Idea of a University* (Ker, 1988, pp. 376-396; Marchetto, 2008, pp. CXXIII-CXXIX).

Rome. By "Liberalism" Newman did not mean the theory and form of State that the British political institutions were then assuming and consolidating, but that "form of incredulity" of his age, founded on the rationalism of the Enlightenment, aimed at freeing man from superstition and dogmas, while fostering freedom of thought and progress. The principles of this new philosophy were the following: "In all things we must go by reason, in nothing by faith [...] faith is a mistake in two ways. First, because it usurps the place of reason, and secondly because it implies an absolute assent to doctrines, and is dogmatic" (Newman, 1957, pp. 123-124).

In a long introductory note to the second edition of *Apologia pro vita sua* (1865), Newman strikes out against the Liberal claim to entrust conscience with the faculty of professing and teaching "what is false and wrong in matters, religious, social, and moral". Moreover, he thinks that Liberalism is responsible for ascribing human morality and happiness to the "arts of life" (Newman, 1994, pp. 260-261). In Newman's thinking, Liberal reason is "usurping", since it misuses its power by applying itself to religion and morals, which are not its prerogatives. So man becomes a God: free will assumes an absolute role, free from any other will, guide or external authority. Wealth becomes the regulating principle of the world, the standard of judgement and the aim of life and all its goods; usefulness and efficacy are considered the only principles capable of informing the law; cultivating and enjoying this life, the only form of wisdom. To Liberal thinkers this world is regulated by practical and useful talents, such as those required for business and technology; while religion, that does not acknowledge them, belongs to the sphere of individual privacy. One can freely choose whether to be religious or an atheist, a Catholic or an Anglican, as long as one does not seek to affect the world. Human nature develops according to a secular pattern, as proven by the progress of science; while religion, that distorts human nature and makes it unfit, substitutes it with another kind of nature. When Newman was made a Cardinal (1879), he wrote: "Liberalism in religion is the doctrine that there is no positive truth, but that one creed is as good as another [...]. Revealed religion is not a truth, but a sentiment and a taste; not an objective fact, not miraculous" (Ward, 1912, p. 460).

Newman understands the meaning of the cultural and political changes that are happening in his time very well: since religious structures of plausibility are weakening, the authority and teaching of the Church is intended to be substituted by "a universal and thoroughly secular education", that appeals to most general moral principles, experience and natural laws;

while religion is reduced to a “private luxury”: those who can afford it, cannot impose it on others (Newman, 1905, pp. 66-67; Ward, 1912, p. 461).

Newman is perfectly aware of what has been happening for some decades in his Country, particularly as far as University education is concerned. In 1827 one of the patriots of Liberalism, Henry Peter Brougham (1778-1868), as a Utilitarian, contributed to the foundation of London University, based on a North-American model: it was open to any religious creed; corresponding to professorial systems, it was neither tutorial nor residential. It aimed at increasing the value of the transmission of knowledge rather than the cultivation of mind, and it renounced that religious education which Newman considered the essence of everything else. The rejection of religious education by London University marked the beginnings of the so called “godless institutions”, where a merely professional knowledge was taught, while the formation of a religious mind was left to the personal sphere. In order to fully understand the revolutionary repercussion of that new academic institution, we must remember the Statutes of the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge, drawn up respectively in 1581 and 1613, and which established that the students should acknowledge the “Act of Supremacy” (1534, by which the English Monarch was the head of the Church of England), subscribe to the “Thirty Nine Articles” and use the “Book of Common Prayer”. This evidently meant that the roots of these two universities were not merely religious, but Anglican, and that the Universities were subjected to the total control of the Church of England. So, the exclusion of religion and theology from University, as in the case of London University, meant dealing a fatal blow to the principles of English academic culture and education (Marchetto 2008, pp. LXXXIII-LXXXVII).

University education in Ireland

In Ireland the situation of University education was exacerbated by the tensions existing between the country's Anglican minority and the Catholic majority. It is worth noting that in England, between 1770 and 1850, the number of Catholics had increased tenfold.

As regards university identity in Ireland, towards the middle of the nineteenth century, two ideological positions, one referring to London, the other to Irish Catholicism, confronted one other. The first of these was characterized by the so-called “godless colleges”, that is, the “Queen's Colleges” of Galway, Cork and Belfast, established by the British Parliament in 1845. From a religious point of view, they were neutral and open to

students of all creeds, since they had abolished all confessional symbols, proof of religious affiliation and the teaching of religious topics. In order to balance this explicitly secular choice, the second position was embodied in the confessional nature of Ireland's only previously existing university institution, the "Holy and Undivided Trinity College" in Dublin, founded by the Queen Elizabeth I and which incorporated the older *Studium generale* of St. Patrick's Cathedral (founded in 1312). In addition to the promotion of knowledge, this Anglican institution was involved in cultivating the moral virtue and religious minds of its students, in order to prevent Irish subjects from turning to foreign Universities, and submitting to the snares of Papism (McGrath, 1951, p. 3).

The opposition between the new secular and the older religious institutions appeared irreparable, as it seemed impossible to reconcile the country's two permanently conflicting creeds. In actual fact, many Catholics had attended Trinity College, Dublin, for centuries, as it was the only university institution on the island; it was thought that agreement between the Irish Catholics and the university, and between the claims of the Anglican and Roman Catholic Churches, might be found in the then new secular tendencies in education. The position of Robert Peel (1788-1850), a leading figure of the British Conservative Party, seemed to prevail over various proposals which animated the discussion: he championed the secular character of university education and government control over the whole system. This was consistent with the principle of "mixed education", which had been the basis of the "Irish System of the National Education", that is, a non-confessional primary-school education under the partial control of the State. When the Irish bishops were confronted with this project, they confirmed the fact that they could not renounce religious education which was necessarily bound to the intellectual one, if people were to be educated completely. Nevertheless, a number of amendments to the law that had first instituted that system, and the extension of its principle to university education, turned it into an organization controlled more directly by the State than by the Anglican Church. Therefore, some Catholic bishops supported "mixed education", while others foresaw in it the danger of the end of the Catholic Church in Ireland, if not that of the conversion of the whole nation to religious Indifferentism. In October 1847 a ruling by *Propaganda Fide* settled the controversy: it urged the bishops not to side with the "godless colleges", and auspicated that Ireland might have a Catholic University, like that of Louvain (Newman, 1896, pp. LXXIII-LXXIV).

The tensions affecting the Irish universities, reveal two fundamental aspects: the exclusion of religion from education and hatred against Catholics, which spread throughout the United Kingdom altogether with the principles of Liberalism. On the one hand, Protestants and Catholics seemed to join in resisting the Liberal politics which provided the a-confessional, secularized and anti-theological universities, dominated by new scientific knowledge. On the other hand, the Protestants attacked the Catholics who claimed that the young Irish had a right to a religious education according to the principles of their Church, which was exactly what the Protestants were asking for in England.

After these premises, the engagement of Newman in Ireland appears as a renewal of his struggle against Liberalism, dating back to 1827, when the idea of a secular London University was taking shape. Since then, he writes, “there has been a formidable movement among us towards assigning in the national life political or civil motives for social and personal duties, and thereby withdrawing matters of conduct from the jurisdiction of religion. Men are to be made virtuous, and to do good works, to become good members of society, good husbands and fathers, on purely secular motives. We are having a wedge thrust into us which tends to the destruction of religion altogether” (Newman, 1896, p. LIII). On the contrary, whoever professes religion in a true way, “makes religious and secular Education one [and the same]” (Newman, 1896, p. 225). This is the position Newman and Cullen agreed on: many of these “impious systems” “are dangerous to faith and morals, and hostile to the eternal interests of the human soul”. What Cullen and Newman wanted for Ireland, was “to persuade the people that education should be religious” (Barr, 2003, pp. 78-81; Ker, 1988, pp. 400-402). In this there was not a fracture between the Anglican and the Catholic Newman.

Newman's Idea of a University

The university Newman meant to lead, was inspired by his idea of university and, at the same time, by the historical reality. The former was constituted by abstract definitions of university, knowledge, culture,...: “a certain great principle” (Newman, 1976, p. 24). The latter unites Newman's biographical experience, the history of universities throughout the centuries, from the Platonic Academy to Oxford, and the images they impressed on his

mind. "What Newman calls the 'bare and necessary idea' of a University is an abstract, general, ahistorical, even static notion of what a University is in its essence, nature, or notion; whereas the image of a University is the concrete, historical, living embodiment of that idea as it was anticipated, realised, or instantiated, however imperfectly in relation to the ideal type, in a particular time and place" (Tillmann, 2001, p. XXVIII; Ker, 1991).

The system of universal knowledge and the principle of truth

The idea of university consists first of all in the unity of knowledge, in the mutual relationship of all branches of knowledge, according to the notion of *encyclopaedia* as a "circle of universal science" (Newman, 1976, p. 63).

Secondly, it is characterized by a "philosophical habit of mind", that is "a comprehensive view of truth in all its branches, of the relations of science to science, of their mutual bearings, and their respective values" (Newman, 1976, pp. 96-97).

Hence, a meaning of "universal knowledge" according to which not all sciences are taught at university, but only a certain number, depending on the "spirit of universality" that is involved in the philosophical mind of the university (Culler, 1955, p. 180). This is achieved by scholars and students from all spheres, so that the university presents itself as a place where ideas are communicated, through relationships among people in a place regulated by the "law" and explicitly devoted to education.

The fact that the university "professes to teach whatever has to be taught in any whatever department of human knowledge" (Newman, 1976, pp. 369, 428), does not mean that it is "a caravanserai" (Newman, 1976, p. 369) of any form of knowledge whatsoever; the university is rather, a "system". Each science accomplishes its task according to its own epistemological statute: it defines its own boundaries and relations with other domains of knowledge; it avoids all possible mutual usurpation, and strives towards superior harmony. The relationships between the sciences correspond to relations between facts. What exists forms a "complex fact", a whole, including innumerable particular facts which establish innumerable relations: mysteries of divine essence and human sensations, the most solemn decrees of God and the most accidental contingencies of existence. This system is "Truth": and its portions are simply the objects of so many "partial visions" called "sciences" (Newman, 1976, pp. 52-53; Marchetto, 2012, pp. 496-510). Therefore, truth appears to be "multiform", according to lines of speculation, enquiry and experimentation that are consistent, though difficult, conflicting

and contradictory. Indeed, the following principle applies: Truth cannot contradict Truth, so that in some instances error is “the way to truth, and the only way”. According to this principle, neither science nor Revelation contradict each other. Newman compares the quest for truth to a journey: “No sailing vessel makes for its port without tacking. And so [...] if we invite reason to take its place in our schools, we must let reason have fair and full play. If we reason, we must submit to the conditions of reason. [...] and to be ever interrupting its processes, and diverting its attention by objections brought from a higher knowledge, is parallel to a landsman’s dismay at the changes in the course of a vessel on which he has deliberately embarked, and argues surely some distrust either in the powers of Reason on the one hand, or the certainty of Revealed Truth on the other. The passenger should not have embarked at all, if he did not reckon on the chance of a rough sea, of currents, of wind and tide, of rocks and shoals; and we should act more wisely in discountenancing altogether the exercise of Reason than in being alarmed and impatient under the suspense, delay, and anxiety which, from the nature of the case, may be found to attach to it. Let us eschew secular history, and science, and philosophy for good and all, if we are not allowed to be sure that Revelation is so true that the altercations and perplexities of human opinion cannot really or eventually injure its authority. That is no intellectual triumph of any truth of Religion, which has not been preceded by a full statement of what can be said against it” (Newman, 1976, pp. 382-383).

The function of philosophy

According to these premises, the university system consists in relations between and among sciences. In order to understand them, “a sort of science distinct from all of them, and in some sense a science of sciences” (Newman, 1976, p. 57) is needed: Newman identifies it with philosophy or a “philosophical temper”; it “is Reason exercised upon Knowledge [...] the power of referring everything to its true place in the universal system [...] it discerns the whole in each part, the end in each beginning, the worth of each interruption, the measure of each delay” (Newman, 1997a, pp. 290-292). This philosophical habit can be seen working within each science, when this “arranges and classifies facts; reduces separate phenomena under a common law; traces effects to a cause” (Newman, 1976, p. 53). Philosophy “gathers up a succession of notes into the expression of a whole, and calls it a melody” (Newman, 1976, p. 75). Because of this aspect, it is the most excellent form

of knowledge and the ultimate end of education, the perfection of intellect and the true enlargement of the mind, that thus develops its natural aptitudes. Where this philosophical habit is missing, the idea of unity of knowledge and the principle of university fail. Indeed, university cannot merely rely on economic resources and a certain number of clever men, as the Utilitarians wanted, but it must found itself on “an idea, a view, an indivisible object, [...] an intellectual principle” (Newman, 1976, p. 423).

What philosophy does, is fulfilled at university, when this is understood as a system, as an “imperial intellect”: “the philosophy of an imperial intellect [...] is based, not so much on simplification as on discrimination. [...] Taking into his charge all sciences, methods, collections of facts, principles, doctrines, truths, which are the reflexions of the universe upon the human intellect, he admits them all, he disregards none, and, as disregarding none, he allows none to exceed or encroach. [...] he observes how separate truths lie relatively to each other, where they concur, where they part company, and where, being carried too far, they cease to be truths at all. [...] If he has one cardinal maxim in his philosophy, it is, that truth cannot be contrary to truth; if he has a second, it is, that truth often *seems* contrary to truth; and, if a third, it is the practical conclusion, that we must be patient with such appearances, and not be hasty to pronounce them to be really of a more formidable character” (Newman, 1976, pp. 371-372).

The truly Liberal education and its contribution to religious education

Forming an imperial intellect is the task of a truly Liberal education. It does not consist in making a young a “gentleman” or in making the mind acquire a great deal of knowledge; but it aims at leading the intellect to perfection, as a moral task. In this, truly Liberal education and new Utilitarian systems of knowledge are different: according to the latter, education must have as its objective a professional knowledge and specialized learning with an exact market price, to the detriment of the person as a whole; while the former cannot be fulfilled in this way: “University training is the great ordinary means to a great but ordinary end; it aims at raising the intellectual tone of society, at cultivating the public mind, at purifying the national taste, at supplying true principles to popular enthusiasm and fixed aims to popular aspiration, at giving enlargement and sobriety to the ideas of the age, at facilitating the exercise of political power, and refining the intercourse of private life” (Newman, 1976, p. 154). According to Newman, the truly useful depends on the value of knowledge

as an end to itself: it is “the *instrument* of good”, so that, “though the useful is not always good, the good is always useful”. It is “reproductive of good”, that is “prolific”; therefore, “if a liberal education be good, it must necessarily be useful too” (Newman, 1976, pp. 143-144). This is the moral value of a truly Liberal education: “To open the mind, to correct it, to refine it, to enable it to know, and to digest, master, rule, and use its knowledge, to give it power over its own faculties, application, flexibility, method, critical exactness, sagacity, resource, address, eloquent expression, is an object as intelligible [...] as the cultivation of virtue, while, at the same time, it is absolutely distinct from it” (Newman, 1976, pp. 111-112).

This connection and, at the same time, difference between the intellectual and moral ends of education, is particularly important as far as the polarity between Humanism and Catholicism, secular education and religious education is concerned. Indeed, religious education at university is closely connected to what Newman calls the “Religion of Reason” or the “Religion of Civilization”, not as intellectual content but as moral and practical meaning. In this relationship he considers Catholicism “chiefly as a system of pastoral instruction and moral duty”, whose doctrines are the directions for conscience (Newman, 1976, p. 159); he considers the “Religion of Reason” analogously. According to this perspective, the education of the mind leads men to a kind of religion, that is “independent of Catholicism, partly co-operating with it, partly thwarting it”. The “Religion of Reason” takes a course completely independent of grace, so that, if it should adhere to Catholicism, it would go on exercising its influence on the world. It belongs to human nature, which it is an “operative principle” (Newman, 1976, p. 157), as grace belongs to the supernatural, but without one taking the other's place (Newman, 2001, p. 79). The course of the former is parallel to the course of the latter, “now across, now divergent, now counter” (Newman, 1976, p. 158). The “Religion of Reason” is the result of natural reason; while the assent of mind to Catholicism is the result of the exercise of “right reason”, that does not usurp provinces which are not its own, and renounces reasoning “on assumptions foreign and injurious to religion and morals” (Newman, 1997a, p. 59). “Right reason” which is rightly exercised in the Roman Catholic faith, teaches the mind to act under its guide, taking Catholicism as “a whole”, without admitting either compromise or modification. Nevertheless, intellectualism, which is the danger of the “Religion of Reason”, can injure it, unless the Church intervenes to defend it from any adulterations. Here he refers to the principle of St. Paul:

“Knowledge puffeth up” (*1 Cor*, 8,1). The presupposition required to reach a true knowledge of human existence, is the practice of humility as an evangelical virtue: “the *fear* of the Lord [...] is the very *beginning* of wisdom” (Newman, 1997b, p. 1632), so that we should “feel and behave as if we were low; not, to cherish a notion of our importance, while we affect a low position” (Newman, 1976, p. 176). So an intellectual education can reveal a profound moral meaning, provided that its possible intellectualism does not become scepticism and incredulity, and does not make the human mind the measure of anything.

Therefore, a Liberal education, if it does not make the Christian or the Catholic, but the “gentleman”, makes an important moral contribution to the Church nonetheless. This consists in freeing a person from subjection to the senses, bringing him “half way to Heaven” (Newman, 1976, p. 160). If man stands between earth and heaven, the intervention of heavenly transcendence is not enough, except “for the occasion”, to raise him up above his nature, which is always drawn down by natural gravitation, that is by the temptation of the senses. At this point, Newman says, “a sort of homeopathic medicine for the disease” is needed: nature must be employed against itself. Here is the most meaningful contribution of intellectual education from a moral point of view: it plays on rational human nature, “expels the excitements of sense by the introduction of those of the intellect”, and “harms it to subjects which are worthy a rational being”. Hence, a disgust at the extremes that are “ungentlemanlike”: Liberal contemplations are of great use to the mind, when they occupy and protect it from vices and narcissism, all risks associated with social progress (Newman, 1976, pp. 161-163).

But this refinement of mind can be of “service to the cause of morality”, if reason is rightly exercised; while, if it “is lifted up with an idea of its own importance, and attempts to form a theory, and to lay down a principle, and to carry out a system of ethics, and undertakes the moral education of the man, then it does but abet evils to which at first it seemed instinctively opposed” (Newman, 1976, p. 173). A “spurious religion” comes from intellectual education: nothing is objective, and its followers are victims of a kind of moral narcissism, whose most emblematic mark is the idea that conscience is a “moral sense”, “a sort of taste”, not “the word of a lawgiver”, but “the dictate” of the human mind (Newman, 1976, pp. 165-166). Newman does not hesitate to define this “Religion of Reason” as superficial: “To *seem* becomes to *be*; what looks fair will be good, what causes offence will be evil; virtue will be what pleases, vice what pains” (Newman, 1976, p. 173).

Philosophical morality is included in this kind of “embellishment of the exterior” (Newman, 1976, p. 175), in which Christian humility is changed into modesty, while its contrary, pride, becomes self-respect. Therefore Newman considers some moral aspects as independent from religious principles, and summarizes them in the notion of the “gentleman”: who strives not to provoke contrasts and is endowed with farsighted caution, patience and tolerance, and resignation to death. These features, that are seen inside and outside the Church, “partly assist and partly distort the development of the Catholic”: “Basil and Julian were fellow-students at the schools of Athens; and one became the Saint and Doctor of the Church, the other her scoffing and relentless foe” (Newman, 1976, p. 181; Bottone, 2010, pp. 143-161).

Faith, reason, person

Behind this comparison between Humanism and Catholicism from a moral point of view, stands the relationship between faith and reason; it implies the subjectivity of the person. Here we can only mention these questions, that are still relevant today, with regard to religious education and confessional beliefs in western constitutional and democratic states. The Liberal tradition, which came to fore in Newman's age, considers religion and faith, as well as the assertions that express them, as a system of irrational beliefs. They are not plausible in the arena of public discussion, since they do not agree with formal and procedural rationality that regulates it in the modern constitutional and democratic State; neither are they criticisable because they are not rationally justified or justifiable.

The enlargement of the idea of reason

Newman proves that faith is not irrational at all; but it is an exercise of reason, when the latter is understood in a broader sense than the narrow view of it Liberalism assumed. Behind the assent of faith, an implicit reason (“illative sense”) acts: a person proceeds on the basis of implicit fundaments, that he cannot make explicit, antecedents he assumes as true without being able to prove their logical sequence. Faith, though it seems contrary to reason, is only independent from the kind of reason exercised by philosophical enquiry and intellectual systems. Therefore, reason cannot be confined to notional apprehension, but it measures itself with the

concreteness of the “living mind”, the experience of life, that “contains abundant evidence that in practical matters, when their minds are really roused, men commonly” not only are reasoners, but “not bad reasoners” (Newman, 1997a, p. 211).

The presupposition underscoring this enlargement of the idea of reason is the concept of the person as an individual and concrete existence. Indeed, individuals possess supremacy over the universal character or “common measure” (reason) to which men belong. For Newman the principle of egotism is central: according to it, “I am what I am, or I am nothing” and “such as I am, it is my all” (Newman, 1985, p. 224; Marchetto, 2010b, pp. 83-118). Hence, the whole person is the active subject of education, not only that part of it which may be referred to the notional intellect: “It is the concrete being that reasons; pass a number of years, and I find my mind in a new place; how? The whole man moves; paper logic is but the record of it” (Newman, 1994, p. 158; Ker, 1993, pp. 1-9).

The presumed irrationality of religious belief

Informed by these ideas, Newman cannot accept the position of the “new era” whereby religion consists in feelings, emotions, affections, ..., but “not at all on reason” (Newman, 1976, p. 40). He ironically explains that, where it prevails, “it is as unreasonable [...] to demand for Religion a chair in a University, as to demand one for fine feeling, sense of honour, patriotism, gratitude, maternal affection, or good companionship” (Newman, 1976, p. 41). The British Government's education council's committee, in its 1848-1850 report, assigns moral and religious education, as well as poetry and music, to an education of “sentiment”, that is completely different from the knowledge of signs (reading and writing), facts (geography and astronomy), relations and laws (mathematics). Religious education is removed from knowledge, and is committed to the satisfaction of a vague wish of something invisible (Newman, 1976, pp. 42-43).

At the same time, the spirit of the age proceeds towards the naturalization of religious doctrines, by considering God's existence and His attributes as derivatives of natural phenomena. The idea of God is reduced to a “function” of the universe; and divine truth “is not something separate from Nature, but it is Nature with a divine glow upon it” (Newman, 1976, p. 48). Theology becomes a physical theology, while the word “God” is quite deprived of the meaning Revelation gives it.

So the “world” exercises a decisive influence on the human imagination, particularly, through the scientific conception of reality. Let us suppose, Newman says, that a person has been receiving for years much information about astronomy, anatomy, chemistry, physics,... nature, so that this perspective becomes well-known to him. When he turns to the teachings of Revelation, these will appear absolutely remote and untrue. This is the strategy the incredulity of the age follows: it relies on the influence the sciences exercise over the imagination, ill-disposing it towards the revealed truth and, at the same time, fascinating it with the marvellous results of scientific studies (Newman, 1976, p. 327).

Being aware of the progressive secularization of society and culture, Newman knows the influence that, historically speaking, ideas have had on the imagination. What moves historical facts largely, are the tendencies and convictions of a people, a party, a group, so that they embody the ideas living in the minds that receive them, although unconsciously: “When some great enunciation, whether true or false, about human nature, or present good, or government, or duty, or religion, is carried forward into the public throng of men and draws attention, then it is not merely received passively in this or that form into many minds, but it becomes an active principle, within them, leading them to an ever-new contemplation of itself, to an application of it in various directions, and a propagation of it on every side” (Newman, 1989, p. 36). This remark, referred to the development of Christianity throughout history, interprets, in a singularly modern way, the situation that the creation of the mass society had brought about. It is no mere chance that an intellectual from a milieu quite unlike Newman's, the French revolutionary socialist Georges Sorel (1847-1922), when formulating his “Theory of myth”, quotes his *Grammar of Assent* verbatim: imagination is the faculty on which ideas determine the future (Newman, 1985, pp. 200-201; Sorel, 1950).

What Newman is witnessing, is the realisation of a “secular” kind of reason, unduly exercised on matters such as religion and morals which are not its prerogative. Its success implies renouncing all and any type of eternal transcendent value while bringing human finiteness to the limit, as the only dimension in which human existence is determined as authentic or unauthentic. Value-systems are left to the dominion of personal decision; *lebensproblem*, the result of which is Weber's polytheism of values, is not the object either of science or of reason, but of conscience. The words Newman wrote in 1852, prefigure what would happen in the following

century: "Man is to be as if he were not, in the general course of Education; the moral and mental sciences are to have no professorial chairs, and the treatment of them is to be simply left as a matter of private judgment, which each individual may carry out as he will" (Newman, 1976, pp. 59-60; Weber, 1989; Berger, 1979; Berger & Luckmann, 1995).

The unbelievers of the age adopt a subtle strategy against religion and theology. They do not intervene to harm or dispute, they simply leave theological schools be; they compete with theology by fostering more interesting, practical and richer studies than it, on Utilitarian principles. Lastly, the exclusion of religion from rationality and of theology from scientific system, in favour of an incredulity founded on presumed freedom of thought and scepticism, was determined also by their lack of utility.

Theology and the principle of truth

The inclusion of theology in the University education system

Newman therefore fights to guarantee theology within the universities as well as religious education in general.

As to the place of theology in the scientific system, the first and most important reason for supporting it is to be found in the idea of the university as a "system" of knowledge. This excludes the idea that the purpose of teaching theology at university is confessional. On the contrary, it is linked to the "idea" of the university as an "imperial intellect", founded on a philosophical habit acting both within each science and identifying structural relations between and among all the sciences, so that a "circle" or a system may be instituted. Claiming a place for theology at university does not depend on the desire to obtain a more Christian university, but on a more philosophical aim, more consistent with its own constitutive principle. Human reason and wisdom are the fundamentals of the inclusion of theology in the system of sciences. Another reason is to be found in epistemological statute of theology. It professes and studies the highest truths the human mind can deal with: issues that often cross the paths of many other sciences, from history to ethics, from physics to metaphysics: if it were excluded, it would produce a mutilated system and an unscientific kind of theology.

Moreover, since theology belongs to the system of sciences, like other subjects it is not indifferent to those who teach it. Indeed, it "takes a colour from the whole system to which it belongs [...]. According then as a teacher

is under the influence, or in the service, of his system or that, so does the drift, or at least the practical effect of his teaching vary” (Newman, 1976, p. 427). This happens to those who teach logic as well as poetry, mathematics or physics; and of course theology. For Newman, neutrality in teaching, with its negative consequences is destined to failure, and can be balanced only by belonging to a system. There is always the risk that a certain science may abuse its power, by usurping the province of other disciplines or by exercising undue pressure on them. The only possibility of avoiding this, consists in mutual control, made possible by including all branches of the sciences in a system: “the only guarantee of Truth” is the cultivation of *all* the sciences (Newman, 1976, p. 419). It is evident that for Newman theology is “one branch of knowledge, and Secular Sciences are other branches”. It is not another kind of knowledge related like the soul is to the body, nor are the other sciences its instruments or appendices. Though it studies the highest and widest object of knowledge, it “does not interfere with the real freedom of any secular science in its own particular department”, precisely because of “the internal sympathy which exists between all branches of knowledge whatever” (Newman, 1976, pp. 427-428).

Object and method of theology

The relationship between the sciences that characterizes the university system, presumes that each form of knowledge has such a clear idea of its object and method, that it does not undergo any form of usurpation. Theology is not a physical theology, neither is it a subject involved in the so called “proofs of religion”, nor is it concerned with a vague and common religion for everybody, nor mere knowledge of Scripture. Theology is simply “the Science of God [...]; just as we have a science of the stars, and call it astronomy, or of the crust of the earth, and call it geology” (Newman, 1976, p. 65). Though it is one among other sciences, nevertheless it is quite different because of its object. Indeed, the infinite being it teaches, is the supreme principle of everything that is good, true and beautiful, and these are the most properly theological meanings of word “God”. If they failed, theology would be reduced to a physical theology, according to which God would be merely identified with the laws of the universe. On the contrary, if its object remained the God of the theologians, but theology were excluded from the system of sciences, then it would be the object of other sciences

which would therefore usurp a domain that does not regard them.

The object of theology determines its very method. Unlike the sciences of nature, and Baconian and Empiristic epistemology, which are founded on induction, theology proceeds by deduction, deriving its doctrines from Revelation. This methodological differentiation is fundamental for the mutual delimitation of the departments of scientists and theologians, but also of their potential, and sometimes effective, conflict. Indeed, enquires into ethics that are founded on experience, lead to Utilitarianism and to a reductive idea of conscience: while it was once seen as the echo of God's voice, it now becomes a mere "taste" and moral sense. On the contrary, theological enquiry derives the truth exclusively from the Revelation to which the human intellect is subordinated, since it certainly cannot increase, but only explain it. Sometimes a hidden conflict between scientists and theologians becomes evident, since the former tend to define the subject-matter of the latter according to their own method, and vice-versa.

The principle of separation, and the inclusion of all the sciences in the university knowledge system, including theology, aim at avoiding their mutual usurpation, but also their mutual suspicion or, worse still, contempt, according to the above-mentioned principle that truth can never contradict truth. This means that religious knowledge and secular knowledge are not incompatible, but incommensurable, in that we cannot derive any conclusion concerning the supernatural world from the natural world, and vice-versa. This limitation of the respective departments of the physical sciences and theology is useful to both, because it saves each from the risk of mutual usurpation, that might stem both from post-Baconian attempts to make theology an experimental science and efforts by theologians to find geological, astronomical, or ethnological confirmation of Holy Scripture, with a view to making the latter consistent with the most recent results of scientific enquiry. This presumes that theology does not occupy a place *not* hierarchically superior to the other sciences, and that it is *not* "the queen of sciences" (Culler, 1955, p. 258; differently from Turner, 1996). Since it studies the highest truths and pervades all the sciences, and cannot avoid the imperfection of mental exercise that passes from abstract to concrete, it is "*first among equals* rather than sovereign over the others" (Ker, 1976, p. lxii).

Theology and truth

Whoever respects the principle of truth, pursues it by remaining free and

loyal to the principles upon which his own science and the system which it belongs to are founded; and he need not fear any charge of recklessness or scandal; but he needs to pay attention exclusively to the object of his enquiry, unimpeded by obstacles. As to this point, which is crucial both to the justification of theology in the system and acceptance of religious education at university, when Newman says "obstacle", he means neither the fundamental principles of religion and morals, nor the so called dogmas. Indeed, for a Catholic, these are not a snares trapping his mind: they hinder his movements as little as "the laws of physics impede his bodily movements"; they are "a second nature", like the scientific laws are for bodily organs (Newman, 1976, p. 380). Newman refers rather to the attempts made by scientists and theologians to interfere with departments that are not their own, even in a reckless and rash way. He appeals precisely to the rigour of enquiry, with his invitation to avoid scandal, that is the provocation of an unwise and imprudent spread of scientific ideas that are against religion, especially among the feeblest and least prepared minds. Again, the principle that truth cannot contradict truth safeguards right and rigorous proceedings of scientific enquiry, including theology. Truth is one, "one complex fact", a "circle" (Newman, 1976, pp. 52, 368): it makes the presumed antagonism between theology and science unnecessary. Truth is sovereign: for it, even error is a bargain.

If "the object of all sciences is truth", and man exercises reason in every department of knowledge, "no matter what man he be, Hindoo, Mahometan, or infidel, his conclusions within his own science, according to the laws of that science, are unquestionable, and not to be suspected by Catholics, unless Catholics may legitimately be jealous of fact and truth, of divine principles and divine creations" (Newman, 1976, p. 249). Hence, there is no need that there be any Catholic science, any Catholic Euclid or Newton, or any Catholic literature. The latter, because of its very nature, describes man as he is, with his passions, heroism and crimes, love and hatred; it describes man as a sinner. Therefore, if the sovereignty of truth is respected, neither the world of science nor the world of humanities need be afraid of the inclusion of theology in university education.

Theology and the idea of Christianity

These remarks on theology and its relations with the other sciences are justified by Newman's idea that talking about theology means talking about "one idea unfolded in just proportions, carried out upon an intelligible

method, and issuing in necessary and immutable results” (Newman, 1976, p. 69). This idea is the content of Revelation, “an authoritative teaching, which bears witness to itself [...] and speaks to all men, as being ever and everywhere one and the same, and claiming to be received intelligently, by all whom it addresses, as one doctrine, discipline, and devotion directly given from above” (Newman, 1985, p. 250). This principle of loyalty to the idea of Christianity that develops throughout history, as a whole (since one cannot believe just some contents of it, choosing them here and there, but one must believe all the *depositum fidei*), induces Newman to refuse any compromise in the teaching of religion; he refuses in particular, the idea of providing an a-confessional moral and religious education like that envisaged by the supporters of “mixed education” and “common religion”.

Though theology should not seek to be taught *in extenso*, it would certainly not lose its character of religious and confessional education, even if it dealing with themes closely regarding the laity. Newman specifies that he considers Christian knowledge “in what may be called its secular aspect, as it is practically useful in the intercourse of life” (Newman, 1976, p. 307). It is a knowledge closer to the philosophy of religion than to theology: indeed, the former defines the object of Revelation from outside; the latter, from inside. So Newman distinguishes between forms of knowledge that may even be labelled “Catholic”, though they do not commit themselves in proselytism, and those which pursue the explicit tasks of catechesis. For instance, “Catholic Literature is not synonymous with Theology, nor does it supersede or interfere with the work of catechists, divines, preachers, or schoolmen” (Newman, 1976, p. 247).

Therefore it should be evident that religious teaching at university does not prejudice the pursuit of secular wisdom; on the contrary, it promotes it in the most complete way, in order to prepare men for the world. Indeed, the university “is not a Convent, it is not a Seminary” (Newman, 1976, p. 197). So Newman confirms the fact that secular and religious teaching are separate, both upon the plane of moral doctrine and from an intellectual point of view. This justifies even more his claim of including religious education and, particularly, theology, in university studies.

Humanism and religious education

Intellectual excellence, moral excellence and “Christian humanism”

On the one hand, a Liberal education leads to the perfection of intellect; on the other, this does not mean that it enables one to achieve moral excellence, which, on the contrary, requires a religious training which assumes holiness as a model. So, we have a kind of knowledge that reaches intellectual though not necessarily moral excellence, that is a gift of the Catholic faith. These two levels must not be confused nor should they be conflictual or continuous; they need to presume an *optional* leap from one to the other: it is free, nourished by grace, obedience and love, that is by the "right faith". Indeed, if faith is an intellectual act and a supposition, the "right faith" is "a reasoning upon holy, devout, and enlightened presumptions". If "faith ventures and hazards; right Faith ventures and hazards deliberately, seriously, soberly, piously, and humbly" (Newman, 1997a, p. 239). Perfection of faith depends on obedience; it is indeed "a presumption, but the presumption of a serious, sober, thoughtful, pure, affectionate, and devout mind. It acts, because it is Faith; but the direction, firmness, consistency, and precision of its acts, it gains from Love" (Newman, 1997a, p. 250). Behind these definitions of faith, there is the theme of the freedom of assent. The certitude that concerns it, is not a passive impression exercised on the mind from outside, but "an active recognition of propositions as true" (Newman, 1985, p. 223); it is a free form of recognition, since it is "active".

We maintained that faith is an act of reason, though this reason that is not exercised by means of explicit reflection; it is an act based on implicit reasoning, constituted by the accumulation of antecedent probabilities leading to assent. This particular reasoning can neither renounce the will, nor be opposed to the will, but it needs supposition beyond reason supported by the will. This explains the character of "active recognition" belonging to certitude of assent. It solves the dichotomy between belief determined directly and exclusively by the will, and belief as an automatic and mechanic reaction, therefore unwilled and necessary, to the objectivity of reasoning; it excludes the notion that certitude depends on a mere act of intuition, which would be more like a "passive impression" than an "active recognition".

So we may conclude that Humanism, a value of a truly Liberal education, is a form of "Naturalism" which, as such, does not provide any instrument capable of reaching beyond the limits of the natural man. In this sense nature is to man as man is to God, according to an unnecessary and free relation: man develops the intellectual talent nature gave him and which he avails of, as freely as he accepts or not the calling of God that bestows on him. In other words, if man wants to reach intellectual excellence, and he is not educated

in philosophy (natural man), he has to mould himself on the basis of a Liberal education; in the same way, a man formed according to a Liberal education (the “gentleman”), if he wants to achieve moral excellence, must educate himself according to faith and holiness. Nevertheless, though a Liberal education and holiness are the highest levels, respectively, of formation of the mind and morality, the natural man as well as the “gentleman” would remain blocked where they are, since the former is not subordinated to the latter, but their choice depends on freedom. Even if the humanistic education model and that of religious education are completely different, they are “as the left leg is opposed to the right – taken together, they enable one to cease halting and to walk. They enable man to fulfil his nature and then to place that nature, fully developed at the service of God”, according to a sort of “Christian humanism” (Culler, 1955, pp. 241-242).

Religious education and Catholic University

Now we have to understand the attribute “Catholic” referred to, which bestows further significance on religious education.

First of all, we need to distinguish between the “essence” of university and its “integrity”: the former explains what the university is, while the latter is “a gift superadded to its nature, without which that nature is indeed complete, and can act, and fulfil its end, but does not find itself [...] in easy circumstances” (Newman, 2001, p. 180). It is like the case of relations between human essence and the fundamental conditions of its survival: man can essentially be such even without air and water, but he would not live long; his essence does not include the air he breathes or the water he drinks, but these two elements are nevertheless necessary to his existence and his completeness as a human being (Newman, 2001, p. 74).

Thus the essence of the university consists in its being “a place of *teaching universal knowledge*. This implies that its object is [...] intellectual, not moral [...]. If its object were [...] 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 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” (Newman, 1976, p. 5). Because of this, the Church does not carry out any act of censure, neither does it aim at excluding a certain literature or a certain science. It “fears no knowledge, but she purifies all; she represses no element of our nature, but cultivates the

whole. [...] her principle is one and the same throughout: not to prohibit truth of any kind, but to see that no doctrines pass under the name of Truth but those which claim it rightfully” (Newman, 1976, pp. 198-199). This form of religious education does not forbid anything but faces up to the contradictions of life according to the spirit of truth. It guides everyone towards truth, that is one.

Though a university be “Catholic”, it is distinct and separate from the Church, and its objective remains knowledge and the cultivation of the intellect as such, not human religiosity. Men can be religious without knowledge; they are Catholic regardless of being students at a university. And if a Catholic University professes Catholicism, it does not because it is a university, but because it is Catholic. Analogously, her morals do not depend on her being a university, and the Church does not use the university for morals, something the “colleges” of the British system of Newman’s age desired. Definitively, “the office of a Catholic University is to teach faith” (McGrath, 1951, pp. 170-171).

In Newman’s words we find the deepest sense of this statement. While enquiring what university is, rather than the duties of the Church towards the university, first of all, he maintained 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, 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. [...] If the Catholic Faith is true, a University cannot exist externally to the Catholic pale, for it cannot teach Universal Knowledge if it does not teach Catholic theology. This is certain; but still, though it had ever so many theological Chairs, that would not suffice to make it a Catholic University; for theology would be included in its teaching only as a branch of knowledge, only as one

out of many constituent portions, however important a one, of what I have called Philosophy. Hence a direct and active jurisdiction of the Church over it and in it is necessary, lest it should become the rival of the Church with the community at large in those theological matters which to the Church are exclusively committed, – acting as the representative of the intellect, as the Church is the representative of the religious principle” (Newman, 1976, p. 183).

The meaning of this text depends on the polarization of essence and integrity: the idea of university and the idea of a Catholic university are related to each other, as secular and religious knowledge, reason and faith, as they are correlative and mutually complementary. The university, as a place of universal knowledge, has no pastoral task, but it provides a Liberal education; nevertheless, as a real place of universal knowledge, it cannot but teach theology and the knowledge of religion too. But this would not be enough to make it a Catholic University, or make people Catholics or Christians, since theology would be included just as a science among sciences. A University becomes Catholic by professing the Catholic creed, that is if it cultivates morals and the Catholic faith under the Church's protection. Indeed, the Church is the sovereign authority of a Roman Catholic University, which is subordinated to it, but “in the same way that one of the Queen's judges is an officer of the Queen's, and nevertheless determines certain legal proceedings between the Queen and her subjects” (Newman, 1976, p. 370).

The function of the Church as regards a Catholic University is therefore that of being “the undaunted and the only defender” of spiritual truth (Newman, 1976, p. 414): “The Catholic Creed is one whole, and Philosophy again is one whole; each may be compared to an individual, to which nothing can be added, from which nothing can be taken away. They may be professed, they may not be professed, but there is no middle ground between professing and not professing. A University, so called, which refuses to profess the Catholic Creed, is, from the nature of the case, hostile both to the Church and to Philosophy” (Newman, 1976, p. 434).

Conclusion

When we think of the place Newman assigned to religious education at university, we need to address the beginnings of secularization in Western

society and culture. The situation he deals with in England and Ireland, is representative of the modern idea of the religious experience, that becomes an object of individual conscience. The modern concept of conscience implies a movement from fate to choice, from taking the world, society, life, personal identity for granted to questioning them. In religion, individuals are called upon to choose their beliefs; and this may also imply they do not choose them at all, but that they prefer to turn to unreligious solutions to address the problem of the sense of their lives (Berger, 1979); so that what Newman is observing, is the primacy of a new secular education over an older religious education, and a clear separation between them.

From his point of view, the problem is as follows: how can the primacy of God be asserted in an age in which man's primacy is such that God is kept well away from the world, if not actually expelled from it? The question becomes even more complex if we consider that assertion of the primacy of God means asserting the primacy of Truth, which is particularly arduous in the current culture of conceptual relativism, which presumes that there is no single explanation (the same for everyone) to the way things are. Truth, in fact, does not depend on how things are, but on how man describes them, on the conceptual patterns man adopts in approaching them (Marchetto, 2010b, pp. 15-34).

We can identify the man whose primacy is today asserted with the "buffered self" of which Charles Taylor speaks (2007, p. 300): he is an individual who "has closed the porous boundaries between the inside (thought) and the outside (nature, the physical)", which "is partly a matter of living in a disenchanted world." Above all, the buffered self, inasmuch as it is no longer exposed to the influence of spirits and external powers, and to the fears, the anxieties and the terrors connected with them, is the *invulnerable* creator of the self, who has no need to commit to God (Marchetto, 2011).

Newman would probably identify the main characteristic of Taylor's "buffered self" in the abuse of reason. This is manifested both in the extreme exercise of doubt in scientific research, with consequent marginalization of ethics and religion, relegated to the sphere of sentiment and emotion, and in reason's claim to the right to *dominion* over faith and moral values, proving their absoluteness because dependent upon rational proof. The outcome today is, on the one hand, unlimited and radical relativism, founded on the principle that what one can do, one may do; on the other hand, the achievement of earthly absolutes which, because of the absolutist concept of

human reason, relativize God to the point of removing Him from history. In both cases, in addition to a kind of reason which Newman defined as “secular”, we find affirmation of the supremacy of “this-world,” considered as the measure of everything.

To modern religious and moral pluralism, which is degenerating more and more into relativism, Newman does not oppose a castling, a closed apologetics of Christianity. Rather, though he is a firm supporter of the primacy of God, he chooses dialogue between opposing positions. He proposes what Taylor calls a “third way” against the “malaise of immanence” (2007, p. 309). The “new era” is such not only because of the accomplishments of the “buffered self”, but also because of the negative aspect of these accomplishments, that is, loss of the meaning to life; Taylor identifies the Romantic poets and writers as the first to perceive this malaise of immanence and to seek answers in a “third way” with respect to the traditional way of orthodoxy and the modern way of invulnerable rationality.

The centrality which Newman assigns to “the living mind”, is found within this context. His reflections on the person express a sense of vacuity and unease in the face of the invulnerability of the “buffered self” of the “new era,” and, at the same time, enunciate the will to reaffirm the primacy of God but in new terms with respect to those which emerged in the most recent theological and metaphysical tradition. Newman’s “third way” does not consist in either irrationalism or the Romantic polarity of idealism and realism, but in the delineation of the only absolute truth in the multiple forms of the particular sciences (including theology), in the enlargement of the idea of reason (including faith and religious education), and in the assertion of the person as a living system (Marchetto, 2011). Therefore, Newman assigns to religious education the task of contributing to the formation of the human mind and person, even if the university has no pastoral or catechetical function. Theology itself is a science within the system of knowledge.

The recognition of religious education at university agrees with its reception within a modern constitutional and democratic state, as one of the voices of what Jürgen Habermas calls the “polyphonic public sphere” (2001, 2005), unlike Rawls’ theory of Liberalism, that excludes religious beliefs from public discussion because of their presumed irrationality, or rather because of their inability to conform to the procedural rationality that governs the debate.

This acceptance occurs both in the case of the enlargement of the idea of reason, and that of the acknowledgment that religious beliefs have been

decisive in the foundation, constitution and the preservation of the modern State. Indeed, reason is one and the same, but is perceptible in a plurality of personal voices, which are certainly not discursive, procedural and formal. This makes it possible to accept a variety of languages, and their mutual translatability and reciprocal understanding. In Newman's view, this form of reason acts concretely in each of us, supported by the *implicit* principle which Habermas, according to Husserl, calls "living world" or "common *ethos*". This includes religious beliefs, and is the ground for a democratically enlightened *common sense*, recognizing, through "critical appropriation", that religious conceptions are the source of the liberal State (Habermas, 1981, 2001, 2005; Marchetto, 2010a).

Acknowledgement of the implicit dimension of every citizen's life is the condition for the social and political redemption of the primacy of God. Unbelievers too, in fact, who support the absolute primacy of man, because they conform to procedural rationality, will no longer represent an institutionally prevailing position with respect to that of believers; while believers will no longer be relegated to the margins of the public debate nor will they be obliged to translate their language into the language of procedural rationality, except in collaboration with unbelievers. The result is the acceptance, by unbelievers, of the idea that from the statements of believers may derive some decisive contributions to the discussion, even at the risk of dissent, recognized by both parties.

Therefore, according to Newman, in the secular age, religious education is perfectly justifiable. As to the experience of faith, it embodies a certain form of concrete and practical rationality which is legitimated as well as others; on the part of theology, it implies a form of knowledge like that of others; finally, it contains a sense of life, that is part and parcel of the grounds on which social communities are built.

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