



University Education Construed in the Light of Faith

Kevin E. O'Reilly OP

In recent times we have begun to witness the emergence of a renewed interest in the importance of distinctively Catholic education. On a practical level, this interest has manifested itself in the establishment of various new liberal arts colleges in the United States. On a theoretical level, it has shown itself in a number of engaging publications by Alasdair MacIntyre, Reinhard Hütter, and Benedict M. Ashley.¹ Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, like his predecessor, John Paul II, has displayed a keen interest in the modern university. Central to his famous Regensburg lecture on 12 September 2006, “Faith, Reason, and the University: Memories and Reflections,” is the broadening of our understanding of reason beyond the confines of a purely empirical attitude. Faith and reason need to be reunited in a new way in order once again to disclose the vast horizons of reason.² Benedict gives voice to the same concern in the speech that was composed for La Sapienza in Rome, a speech that was never delivered as the university withdrew its invitation to the Holy Father at the last moment. In the course of this speech, he states that “if reason, out of concern

¹ Alasdair MacIntyre, ‘The End of Education: The Fragmentation of the American University,’ *Commonweal* 133 (2006); *God, Philosophy, Universities: A Selective History of the Catholic Philosophical Tradition* (NY: Rowman and Littlefield, 2009); ‘The Very Idea of a University: Aristotle, Newman and Us,’ *New Blackfriars* 91 (2010), pp. 4–19; Reinhard Hütter, ‘God, the University, and the Missing Link – Wisdom: Reflections on Two Untimely Books,’ *The Thomist* 73 (2009), 241–77; Benedict M. Ashley, O.P., *The Way toward Wisdom: An Interdisciplinary and Intercultural Introduction to Metaphysics* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006).

² “The intention here is not one of retrenchment or negative criticism, but of broadening our concept of reason and its application. While we rejoice in the new possibilities open to humanity, we also see the dangers arising from these possibilities and we must ask ourselves how we can overcome them. We will succeed in doing so only if reason and faith come together in a new way, if we overcome the self-imposed limitation of reason to the empirically falsifiable, and if we once more disclose its vast horizons. In this sense theology rightly belongs in the university and within the wide-ranging dialogue of sciences, not merely as a historical discipline and one of the human sciences, but precisely as theology, as inquiry into the rationality of faith” (Available at http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2006/september/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20060912_university-regensburg_en.html).

for its alleged purity, becomes deaf to the great message that comes to it from Christian faith and wisdom, then it withers like a tree whose roots can no longer reach the waters that give it life. It loses the courage for truth and thus becomes not greater but smaller.”³

The renewed interest in Catholic higher education is clearly in response to a crisis that has developed in general in modern education and which has enveloped Catholic education to a significant degree. In this article I will therefore begin by delineating the genesis and dynamics of this crisis in modernity, one occasioned by the assertion of the autonomy of reason and its loosing from the moorings of faith. The dynamics of reason thus conceived contrast sharply with those entailed when the relationship of harmony that obtains between faith and reason is acknowledged. Since faith has implications for how we construe the life of reason it also has, by extension, ramifications for how we conceive the educational curriculum and ethos of any educational enterprise that claims to be Catholic. Since the way in which the educational curriculum is construed has implications for wider society, a reevaluation of the curriculum in the light of faith seems to be legitimated by the various disorders that have arguably been effected by the currently predominant one. This article suggests that greater attention to the educational work of John Henry Cardinal Newman – which work has clearly influenced Benedict XVI’s thinking – would not only help Catholic universities fulfill their function properly but would also make an important contribution to wider society as a result.

The Crisis in Modern Education

In epistemology many post-Cartesian philosophers have been concerned with skeptical objections such as we do not know much, or most or even all of what we think we know. In response to such objections some philosophers formulated a foundationalist theory of justification.⁴ They hoped that this would lay skeptical worries to rest by admitting as foundational only beliefs which were indubitable, or

³ Available at http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2008/january/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20080117_la-sapienza_en.html

⁴ According to a foundationalist account, some beliefs are justified in and of themselves and not on the basis of their relationship to other beliefs. Nonfoundational beliefs, in contrast, receive their justification from their relationship to other beliefs and are ultimately justified by their relationship to foundational beliefs. The account of *scientia* given in the *Posterior Analytics* is foundational, for demonstrations productive of *scientia* derive from principles which are not known through demonstration, and *scientia* of other truths is by way of demonstrations which employ these principles as premises. For a critical account of foundationalism, see W. Jay Wood, *Epistemology: Becoming Intellectually Virtuous* (Leicester: Apollos, 1998), pp. 77–104.

at least obvious and secure enough to withstand skeptical objections. Other beliefs could then be justified on the basis of these. One characteristic of these kinds of views is the requirement that foundational beliefs be evident to the rational subject as a result of his autonomous investigation. The reason for this insistence on autonomous investigation is the belief that any reliance on authority or other mediating presuppositions would be open to skeptical challenge. Consequently, assent to them would not be fully rational. However, this deference to skeptical objections and the attempt to answer them on their own terms, that is to say, by way of autonomous investigation without any reference to authority, contains within itself the seeds of its own destruction. Reason begins to believe itself to be absolute and to be the arbitrator of truth, eventually justifying the irrational and turning itself into an irrational accident. Cardinal Ratzinger expresses this point very well in the following terms:

When the big bang counts as the absolute beginning of the universe reason is no longer the standard and foundation of reality but the irrational; even reason is then only a by-product of the irrational, the product of “chance and necessity”, indeed, the result of a mistake, and to that extent itself too something irrational.⁵

In contrast, theology rests on the presupposition that what we believe, the basis and foundation of everything, is reasonable and indeed is reason itself. Theology, as faith seeking understanding (*fides quaerens intellectum*) seeks to grasp this foundation along with its content. Like Greek philosophy, Christian theology is concerned with truth itself, with being. Christian theology is not concerned simply with texts and their interpretation; its fundamental dynamic orders it towards truth itself, and it sees human beings as capable of truth. The attainment of ultimate Truth however is not a matter of detached speculative enquiry. In order to come to know this truth it is necessary to model one’s knowing and willing according to Christ’s teaching and example. St. Thomas argues that Christ’s assumption of a truly human nature endowed with singular moral perfections forms the basis of the notion that He is the supreme exemplar to imitate, a notion encapsulated by the expression “Christ’s action is our instruction.”⁶ In His eternally conceived Word God knows both Himself and all things. The Word, the eternal concept of God’s wisdom, thus constitutes the exemplar likeness of all created things and in particular of human nature. The fact that the Person of the Son was personally united to human nature means that His moral example, since it is ontologically grounded in His eternal procession, constitutes the

⁵ Joseph Ratzinger, *Church, Ecumenism and Politics: New Essays in Ecclesiology* (NY: St Paul Publications, 1988), pp. 153–154.

⁶ *ST III*, q. 40 a. 1 ad 3: “Christi actio fuit nostra instructio.”

supreme manifestation of the ordering force of divine Wisdom in human affairs. To imitate the example of Christ therefore means that the disciple is assimilated to God's very own Wisdom, albeit analogically in a mode proportioned to human nature.⁷ This assimilation to the divine Wisdom by way of assimilation to the mysteries of Christ's life is effected by grace and has the Church, as sanctified by the Holy Spirit, as its theological context.⁸

It is interesting to delineate briefly, in the light of what we have just said and following the lead of Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger/Benedict XVI, the context in which the university arose in Europe and what has happened to it subsequently. The society in which the universe first appeared was one imbued with a strong Catholic faith, a faith which declared that the search for truth was possible and which, at the same time, provided a stimulus for this search. The enquiries of speculative and practical reason, unfolding in the context of living faith, assimilated the enquirers to the divine Wisdom. Rational enquiry inquiry focused on many different spheres of reality, thus giving rise to various faculties, which were nevertheless held together by their common orientation toward the question of truth. And the question of truth was not construed in Enlightenment terms. In this regard, the ultimate possibility of investigating it they knew to belong to the faculty of theology, which remained the final arbitrator in matters of truth. Thus, as Cardinal Ratzinger tells us, "the university is a product of the mandate of truth to be found in the Christian act of faith."⁹ When the context of faith is dissolved, as it has been in modernity, there thus arises "a crisis of the university that involves its foundations."¹⁰ This crisis is characterized by the disappearance of the question of truth from the university as an unscientific question.

What has come to pass in the wake of the demise of truth as a concern in the university system is at best the advent of a collection of courses which aim to expose students to various aspects of the culture and learning of Western civilization. At worst we simply get a conglomeration of departments ruled by positivist reason and functional thinking, whose curricula are simply professional and technological. Thus, it appears that we are "progressing" beyond a desire to impart a liberal education, even of a distorted humanistic variety, to a situation in which utilitarian concerns are the order of the day. If we look at where most educational funding is allocated in Europe and in the

⁷ God's Wisdom revealed to us in Christ possesses, however, a cruciform character and consequently seems foolish to worldly wisdom.

⁸ For a much expanded elaboration of this point, see Kevin E. O'Reilly, *The Hermeneutics of Knowing and Wishing in the Thought of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Leuven: Peeters, 2013), especially chapter VI, "A Hermeneutics of Faith."

⁹ Ratzinger, *Church, Ecumenism and Politics*, p. 155.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

United States, it becomes quite clear that vocational instruction is all too often seen to be the end of education.

Theology itself is not immune from the positivistic mindset. Instead of seeking the truth in its authoritative texts, it can fall prey to contenting itself with explaining the historical conditions in which they were composed, reconstructing their original significance by means of historical methods, and comparing them critically with interpretations which have been proposed during the course of their history. Thus, theology can and – unfortunately in many instances – does become one department among many others, fully adapted to the canons of positivist reason. It can claim only equal status, at best, to any other department. Even where this development has not taken place, sight has been lost of the idea that the curriculum as a whole might – much less, should – be ordered in the light of faith.

Having delineated the origins and dynamics of the crisis in contemporary university education, a crisis occasioned by the assertion of the autonomy of reason and its loosing from the moorings of faith, we now turn in the next section to a Catholic understanding of the relationship that properly obtains between faith and reason. This understanding prepares the way for the final section which deliberates on the kind of curriculum and structures that ought to characterize a Catholic university.

The Role of Faith in the Life of Reason

Most fundamental to the Catholic educational enterprise is that it be imbued with the dynamic of faith seeking understanding. Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger rightly points out that “faith precisely as faith wants reason.”¹¹ According to a Catholic understanding, not only is faith not destructive of reason, a relationship of harmony obtains between them, a relationship which St. Thomas highlighted. Indeed, as John Paul II points out in his encyclical, *Fides et Ratio*, in the work of Thomas “the demands of reason and the power of faith found the most elevated synthesis ever attained by human thought, for he could defend the radical newness introduced by Revelation without ever demeaning the venture proper to reason.”¹² St. Thomas asserts that since the light of reason and the light of faith both come from God, no contradiction can exist between them.¹³ He recognizes, moreover, that philosophy could contribute to an understanding of divine Revelation. Faith therefore need have no fear of reason; on the contrary, it seeks it out and has trust in it.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 153.

¹² *FR* 78.

¹³ See *SCG*, I, 7.

In this regard, Vatican I's teaching is noteworthy. It states that "God, the source and end of all things, can be known with certainty from the consideration of created things, by the natural power of human reason."¹⁴ Denys Turner explains that Vatican I's statement "is intended as a statement of faith, concerning what a true understanding of faith entails about the capacity of human reason to know God, namely that it *is* possible for human reason to know God and that the God of faith is one and the same as the God who can be known by reason."¹⁵ Newman's thought concerning the structure and content of the educational curriculum which is delineated in the next section reflects this conviction of faith. Indeed, a familiarity with St. Thomas's Five Ways along with the metaphysical concepts that underpin them ought arguably to be an indispensable part of the intellectual formation of any student attending a Catholic university.

While "faith precisely as faith wants reason," Cardinal Ratzinger however also calls attention to a truth that has been largely forgotten by Catholic educational institutions, namely that "reason presupposes faith as its environment."¹⁶ A resurgence in interest in virtue ethics in recent times has the potential to highlight the fundamental importance of a faith context in the proper development of the life of reason. As one author puts it, "a Christian's views about an excellent life (intellectual, moral, social, etc.) are embedded within a religious framework specifying God's desires for us and the world. My success as a cognitive being will therefore be determined in part by how well I am achieving the goals my tradition sets for me."¹⁷ Here we can draw upon the insights of the hermeneutical philosopher, Hans Georg Gadamer, albeit transferring them to the context of faith.

Gadamer argues that to abandon all of reason's starting points (he calls them "prejudices"), simply because they have been bequeathed to us by a tradition, is hasty in the extreme; they could after all be true. Moreover, reliance on authority other than ourselves does not entail the abandonment of reason. In fact, quite the reverse obtains: recognition of legitimate authority in intellectual and other matters requires a judgement of one's reason. According to Gadamer:

[T]he authority of persons is ultimately based not on the subjection and abdication of reason but in an act of acknowledgment and knowledge – the knowledge, namely, that the other is superior to oneself in judgment

¹⁴ *Dogmatic Constitution on the Catholic Faith*, <http://www.nyu.edu/classes/gmoran/VATICAN1.pdf> (accessed 20/03/2013).

¹⁵ Denys Turner, *Faith, Reason, and the Existence of God* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 4. This assertion does not of itself imply that there are in fact any successful proofs for the existence of God. It simply maintains that reason is in principle capable of providing such a proof.

¹⁶ Ratzinger, *Church, Ecumenism and Politics*, p. 153.

¹⁷ Wood, *Epistemology*, p. 30.

and insight and that for this reason his judgment takes precedence – i.e., it has authority over one’s own . . . It rests in acknowledgment and hence on an act of reason itself which, aware of its own limitations, trusts to the better insight of others. Authority in this sense, properly understood, has nothing to do with obedience to commands. Indeed, authority has to do not with obedience but rather with knowledge.¹⁸

What Gadamer points out here can obviously be applied to the authority of Christ and of His Church – which is His abiding in the world until His return at the end of time – *vis-à-vis* the individual believer.

A crucial point to bear in mind in this respect is that the individual Christian cannot be regarded as an isolated person. As Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger expresses this point, “the “I” of the credo-formulas is a collective “I”, the “I” of the believing Church, to which the individual “I” belongs as long as it believes. . . . [T]his “I” utters itself only in the *communion* of the Church.”¹⁹ The Church herself is the transtemporal subject of faith, rooted in the *communion* of the Holy Trinity and having her origin in Christ. As such, the Church is “the condition for the real participation in Jesus’ *traditio*, which without this subject exists, not as a historical and history-making reality, but only as private recollection.”²⁰ Participation in Jesus’s *traditio* and in the mystery of the life of the triune God cannot be achieved simply by an intellectual grasp of the articles of the creed. As Cardinal Ratzinger observes, “There is . . . a significant area of instruction in which the teaching [of faith] ceases to be purely doctrinal: Christian faith is also an ethos.”²¹ In order truly to know the faith it is necessary to live it in the communion of the Church.

Since faith elevates human reason and since faith is ecclesial in character, it follows that the optimal functioning of reason in this life requires that it unfold within the Church as its connatural context.²² Outside the Church, which “subsists in the Catholic Church” and which “is governed by the successor of Peter and by the bishops in communion with him,”²³ reason is hampered to some degree or other. Indeed, this can be said of those who claim to be within the Church but who seemingly believe that various aspects of Church

¹⁸ Hans Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (NY: Continuum, 1993), 279.

¹⁹ Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology: Building Stones for a Fundamental Theology*, trans. Sister Mary Frances McCarthy, S.N.D. (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1987), p. 23.

²⁰ Joseph Ratzinger, *Dogma und Verkündigung* (Munich and Freiburg: Wewel, 1973), p. 265. Quoted in Maximilian Heinrich Heim, *Joseph Ratzinger: Life in the Church and Living Theology – Fundamentals of Ecclesiology with Reference to Lumen Gentium* (Ignatius: San Francisco, 2007), p. 149.

²¹ Cardinal Ratzinger, *Principles*, p. 36.

²² For an extended formulation of this argument, see O’Reilly, *The Hermeneutics of Knowing and Loving*.

²³ *Lumen Gentium* 8.

teaching on faith and morals are open to debate. In their case, noetic participation in the life of the Word present in the Church by the power of the Holy Spirit is weakened. This is the same as saying that their capacity for truth is therefore dimmed. Immersion in the faith of the Church handed down to us from the Apostles, which faith is safeguarded by the Magisterium, is a *sine qua non* for the optimal functioning of reason in this life.

In brief, faith elevates the life of human reason and faith is ecclesial in character. Since the educational enterprise is a work of reason, it follows that a Catholic university will reflect this fact both in the curriculum it offers to students and in the various practical structures whereby it seeks to facilitate the transmission of Catholic faith and morals, recognizing that this transmission must necessarily make appeal to the human person in his/her entirety and not just at an intellectual level if it is to have any degree of success. In dealing with these issues the next section turns to the contributions of John Henry Cardinal Newman, whose contributions remain as timely now as at the time when they were written. While they stand in need of adaptation in some respects in face of the dynamics of contemporary culture, they nonetheless offer clear guidance with regard to the essentials of curriculum and the provision of an attendant ethos that facilitates faith formation in the student body.

The University Curriculum and University Structures Construed in the Light of Faith

While unaided philosophical reason can prove the existence of God as the First Efficient Cause of all that exists,²⁴ Judaeo-Christian faith brings to this unaided reason a clarity of which it is not capable on its own, as we have seen. The genius of John Henry Cardinal Newman was able to crystallize the significance of this fact for how a university curriculum should be constituted. Since all parts of the universe proceed from the same Creator as the unique creative cause, they are all related to each other. Thus, he writes, “the universe in its length and breadth is so intimately knit together, that we cannot separate off portion from portion, and operation from operation, except by a mental abstraction.”²⁵ Consequently, as MacIntyre writes, “it is only through the relationships of the different parts of and aspects of the universe to God that its unity and intelligibility can adequately be

²⁴ See, for example, *ST I*, 2, 3.

²⁵ John Henry Cardinal Newman, *The Idea of a University* (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1925), p. 50.

grasped.”²⁶ In brief, all truth is interconnected and a curriculum that attempts to expose its students to truth – rather than to focus on portions of reality in such a way that risks distorting the overall vision of students – will reflect the interconnectness of all aspects of the created universe. The presence of a broad range of disciplines means that they can “complete, correct, balance each other.”²⁷ Thus, he argues, “the conclusions of Anatomy, Chemistry, Dynamics, and other sciences, are revised and completed by each other.” He continues: “Those several conclusions do not represent whole and substantive things, but views, true, so far as they go; and in order to ascertain how far they do go, that is, how far they correspond to the object to which they belong, we must compare them with the views taken out of that object by other sciences.”²⁸

The foregoing argumentation demands however that the curriculum must include religion. In order to support this point Newman appeals to the fact that knowledge assumes various forms. We distinguish different forms of knowledge on the basis of their appeal to sensory evidence, intuition, testimony, abstract reasoning, and so on. If, however, we were to restrict our understanding of knowledge to that furnished by the evidence of our senses, for example, then we would have to disregard ethics; if intuition alone were accepted as the sole basis for authentic knowledge then history would have no place; metaphysics would be excluded if testimony were the exclusive requirement for true knowledge; and physics would not be entertained if abstract reasoning were deemed to be the only true basis of knowledge. Clearly, none of these reductionist attitudes is tenable. In concluding his argument for the inclusion of religion in the curriculum, Newman asks rhetorically: “Is not the being of a God reported to us by testimony, handed down by history, inferred by an inductive process, brought home to us by metaphysical necessity, urged on us by the suggestions of our conscience?”²⁹ He makes this point again a little further on while reiterating the implications of the existence of God for knowledge:

Admit a God, and you introduce among the subjects of your knowledge, a fact encompassing, closing in upon, absorbing, every other fact conceivable. How can we investigate any part of any order of Knowledge, and stop short of that which enters into every order? All true principles run over with it, all phenomena converge to it; it is truly the First and the Last.³⁰

²⁶ Alasdair MacIntyre, *God, Philosophy, Universities: A Selective History of the Catholic Philosophical Tradition* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2009), p. 175.

²⁷ Newman, *The Idea of a University*, p. 99.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

When religion is placed in the context of a Catholic university it naturally takes on the form of Catholic theology. It follows therefore that Catholic theology ought to form an integral part of the Catholic university curriculum. A Catholic university “cannot teach Universal Knowledge if it does not teach Catholic theology.”³¹ As MacIntyre expresses this point in the course of a discussion about Newman, “if the curriculum is to have the unity that it needs to have, if it is to disclose the unity of the order of things, then the discipline of theology is indispensable.” He continues: “For it is theology that provides the curriculum with its unity and we will not understand the bearing of the other disciplines on each other adequately, if we do not understand theology’s bearing on them and theirs on theology.”³²

It is not enough however for a university to teach Catholic theology even if it does so in complete fidelity to its demands. It is also necessary that the Church breathe her own pure and unearthly spirit into it, and fashion and mould its organization, and watch over its teaching, and knit together its pupils, and superintend its action”³³ In other words, the Church ought to have an active jurisdiction over the university if it is to be truly Catholic. In the absence of this active jurisdiction a divorce of faith and reason almost inevitably ensues. A university affected by this divorce has a tendency “to view Revealed Religion from an aspect of its own, – to fuse and recast it, to tune it, as it were, to a different key, and to reset its harmonies, – to circumscribe it by a circle which unwarrantably amputates here, and unduly develops there.”³⁴

Ian Kerr points out that the notion that the Church should exercise jurisdiction over a Catholic university may be regarded “as hardly more than a specific application of the general principle that a university is inevitably limited and defined by its concept of what constitutes knowledge and truth.”³⁵ Certainly, Newman’s insistence on ecclesial control ought not to be interpreted as being in any way sinister. Certainly, he does not mean the university to be a mere instrument of the Church.³⁶ His insistence on ecclesial authority

³¹ Ibid., p. 214.

³² MacIntyre, ‘The Very Idea of a University,’ p. 12.

³³ This sentence is adapted from Newman, *The Idea of a University*, p. 216.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 217.

³⁵ Ian Ker, *John Henry Newman* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 389.

³⁶ See Newman, *The Idea of a University*, p. ix: “The view taken of a University in these Discourses is the following: – That it is a place of teaching universal knowledge. This implies that its object is, on the one hand, intellectual, not moral; and, on the other, that it is the diffusion and extension of knowledge rather than the advancement. If its object were scientific and philosophical discovery, I do not see why a University should have students; if religious training, I do not see how it can be the seat of literature and science. Such is a University in its essence, and independently of its relation to the Church. But, practically speaking, it cannot fulfil its object duly, such as I have described it, without the Church’s

simply serves to remind us that “that a university must teach all the knowledge it professes to teach – in accordance with its idea of what constitutes knowledge – unequivocally and without compromise.”³⁷

Ecclesial control also has a decisive importance for the ethical fabric of a university. Newman is conscious of the distortions that can affect an approach to ethics that leaves aside religion. The intellectualism that underpins it may well begin by repelling sensuality but in fact “ends by excusing it.”³⁸ In a manner reminiscent of the teaching of John Paul II in *Fides et Ratio*, it is clear that for Newman reason needs faith if the morality that it informs is not to be defective: “Under the shadow indeed of the Church, and in its due development, Philosophy does service to the cause of morality.”³⁹ In contrast, any system of ethics formulated on the basis of reason that asserts its independence from faith “does but abet evils to which at first it seemed instinctively opposed.”⁴⁰ Thus, while the aim of the university as conceived by Newman is essentially intellectual and not moral, he is not blind to the link between them. In his *University Sketches*, moreover, where he adumbrates the collegiate structures that would characterize a university functioning according to his ideal, it is clear that these very collegiate structures are meant to contribute in a significant way to the moral formation of students, that is to say, the various colleges within the framework of the university concern themselves with “the formation of character, intellectual and moral”⁴¹ among other things. In *My Campaign in Ireland*, moreover, Newman highlights the role that an ethos of faith and devotion plays in the educational endeavour. In this regard he highlights the role of the university church and university preacher: “I cannot well exaggerate the influence, which a series of able preachers, distinguished by their station and their zeal,

assistance; or, to use the theological term, the Church is necessary for its integrity. Not that its main characters are changed by this incorporation: it still has the office of intellectual education; but the Church steadies it in the performance of that office.” See Avery Cardinal Dulles, SJ, *Newman* (London and New York: Continuum, 2002), p. 141: “For Newman the university is not a mere instrument of the Church. It requires a measure of autonomy because it has its own proper end, distinct from that of the Church. its specific aim is not the salvation of souls but higher education.” Further on Dulles comments that the university “exercises sovereignty over the various disciplines, maps out their respective territories, and adjudicates disputes among them. But the sovereignty of the university, in Newman’s view is limited. Insofar as grace and revelation are superior to nature and reason, the Church, which is sovereign in speaking about these higher realms, has a certain authority over the Catholic university. The infallible pronouncements of the Church must be accepted without question” (ibid.).

³⁷ Ker, *John Henry Newman*, p. 389.

³⁸ Newman, *The Idea of a University*, p. 202.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ John Henry Newman, *University Sketches*, ed. Michael Tierney (London and Newcastle-on-Tyne: The Walter Scott Publishing Co., 1903), p. 222.

will exert upon the young men entering into life, externs and interns, and the students of various professions, who will constitute the mass of University residents.”⁴² He continues by stating that this institution “will force the University upon public notice, and raise it in public estimation by the presence of the most sacred of all schools, the school of faith and devotion.”⁴³ As David Fleischacker comments: “[B]ecause of the close unity of culture and the university, university church and preacher are a profound center in which spiritual realities are illuminated in the context of faith and reason, and then brought forth into the horizon of a culture.”⁴⁴

Newman of course lived and wrote in an era when even moral norms received much stronger support from the surrounding culture than they do in our own times. Hence the lack of any extended comment on the inculcation of moral norms in a university context even though such inculcation is arguably implied in his reflections. In contrast, today witnesses the context of a surrounding culture that is all too often at variance with a Catholic ethos. In the words of Cardinal Ratzinger: “If Christianity, on one hand, has found its most effective form in Europe, it is necessary, on the other hand, to say that in Europe a culture has developed that constitutes the absolutely most radical contradiction not only of Christianity, but of the religious and moral traditions of humanity.”⁴⁵ In this cultural context, Melanie. M. Morey and John M. Piderit, S.J., observe that ““in many instances, modern [university] residence hall living is a far cry from the positive reinforcement Newman describes.”⁴⁶

Morey and Piderot consider two manifestations of this shadow culture, namely substance abuse⁴⁷ and sexual intimacy.⁴⁸ They conclude the section on substance abuse with a Newmanian injunction: “The rules of a Catholic university should reflect the moral teachings of the Church, and the formation programs should invite students to understand the wisdom of these teachings.”⁴⁹ In concluding their discussion of sexual intimacy, they write:

⁴² Cardinal Newman, *My Campaign in Ireland*, part I: *Catholic University Reports and Other Papers* (Aberdeen: A. King and Co., 1896), p. 24.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Fleischacker, “The Place of Modern Scientific Research in the University According to John Henry Newman,” *Logos* 15 (2012), p. 110.

⁴⁵ Translation of the lecture given in Italian in the convent of Saint Scholastica, Subiaco, Italy, accessed at <http://www.catholiceducation.org/articles/politics/pg0143.htm> (20/03/2013).

⁴⁶ Melanie. M. Morey and John M. Piderit, S.J., *Catholic Higher Education: A Culture in Crisis* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006], 143***

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 145–46.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 146–48.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 146.

Clearly, a Catholic university should act against . . . abuses, both to educate students about the teachings of the Church concerning intimacy and to uphold those teachings. . . . The Catholic university educates the whole person, and an important part of that educational mission involves helping students understand and appreciate relational justice, what constitutes appropriate limits and boundaries in relationships, the true meaning of relational intimacy and friendship, and the importance of lifelong commitment as the context for loving sexual expressions between man and women. When students disregard these norms, university authorities should act to support the Catholic culture.⁵⁰

The authors are in effect arguing that university rules or laws provide a context that facilitates the inculcation of virtue. It is still possible, perhaps likely, that these rules will have little effect in the face of the power of the surrounding culture. Their absence however effectively sanctions the norms of that culture.

Conclusion

In his recent book, *God, Philosophy, Universities: A Selective History of the Catholic Philosophical Tradition*, Alasdair MacIntyre argues that economic and political pressures have led to the curriculum becoming increasingly “an assorted ragbag of disciplines and subdisciplines, each pursued and taught in relative independence of all the others, and achievement within each consists in the formation of the mind of a dedicated specialist.”⁵¹ Catholic universities by and large do not furnish an exception to this rule. Elsewhere, MacIntyre claims that this construal of the educational enterprise has wreaked various disasters on the world in the last number of decades.⁵² The examples he cites in support of this claim include the Vietnam War, US policy towards Iran for more than half a century, and the economic crisis of the recent past. The protagonists of such crises lacked the general education at both graduate and, especially, undergraduate levels that made it possible for them “to act decisively and deliberately without knowing what they were doing.”⁵³

The integrated ordering of the educational curriculum in the light of the Christian faith and an appropriate attendant ethos places any truly Catholic university in stark contrast to the general contemporary state of affairs. If MacIntyre’s thesis is correct – and it certainly has a strong *prima facie* plausibility – then the structuring of the educational curriculum in the light of faith will not only help to

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 148.

⁵¹ MacIntyre, *God, Philosophy, Universities*, p. 174.

⁵² MacIntyre, ‘The Very Idea of a University,’ p. 17.

⁵³ Ibid.

direct students along the path to salvation, it may well help to save contemporary civilization from itself. In this regard, due attention to Newman's educational writings would be in order.

Kevin E. O'Reilly OP

Angelicum University

Rome

Italy

keor2007@yahoo.com