

## NEWMAN, CHRISTIAN OR HUMANIST?

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TWO books<sup>1</sup> appeared in the course of this year, one by Professor Culler dealing with Newman's life as a humanist, the other, edited by Fr Bouyer, publishing for the first time many of the autographical memoirs that show forth Newman very much as the delicately conscientious Christian. It would appear to be Professor Culler's view that these two aspects in Newman's character were never fully harmonized. In fact, one wonders whether, in the professor's view, they could be harmonized, at least in the forms they took in Newman's mind. So unharmonized were they in Newman's early life, we are led to believe, that their conflict resulted in five crushing illnesses during his youth and early manhood. However, 'as adolescence passed and as Newman moved into a religious position which was not distrustful of intellect, the conflict gradually resolved itself into the precarious balance which is achieved in the *Idea of a University*.'<sup>2</sup> But, though Professor Culler here says that the conflict resolved itself, it is obvious that he does not really believe that such a resolution ever took place. The author of the humanistic discourses in the *Idea of a University* is, according to Professor Culler, a survival of the vainglorious person who dabbled in un-Christian speculations, but who was suppressed in Newman's youth from his conscious life, when he turned to religion. The author of the religious discourses in the same book is the other Newman, 'the docile and submissive creature who emerged'<sup>3</sup> when the early crisis has passed. We are, then, to believe that the *Idea of a University* reflects two characters in rebellion against each other, one representing the spirit of humanistic and religious liberalism, the other pietistic and anti-liberal evangelicalism.

His humanism, it seems, inclined him to love the world and its

1 A. Dwight Culler, *The Imperial Intellect*. (Yale University Press, London: Cumberlege; 40s.).

Newman, *Écrits autobiographiques*, English and French. Introduction by Henry Tristram, translated by Isabelle Ginot, revision and notes by Louis Bouyer. (Desclée de Brouwer.)

2 A. D. Culler, *op. cit.*, p. 228.

3 A. D. Culler, *op. cit.*, *ibid.*

beauty, and the literature and culture of man. His Christianity led him to distrust the attractions of this world, and above all intellectual excellence, and look only at one's sinfulness and the need of grace, with one's eyes upon God and eternity. There could never be final peace, it follows, in Newman's mind and heart. True, he came near to achieving the impossible in the Dublin Discourses, but the conflicting sides of his character could not really solve the contradiction.

Professor Culler does not obtrude his thesis upon his readers. Many will read his book without realizing it. To them, it will be the most recent, and one of the most readable, as well as entirely fresh, biographies of one of the greatest of modern Englishmen. The style of the book is charming, the approach disarming and gentle, the scholarship wide and unobtrusive. It is the life-story, not of Newman the great religious leader, not of Newman the great preacher, not even of Newman the master of English prose. It is a fairly new Newman that is here portrayed, Newman the educationalist, who wrote in 1863, as we read in the preface, 'Now from first to last education, in this large sense of the word, has been my line.'<sup>4</sup> If Newman had never entered the Church, he would still have been one of the greatest figures of our time. It is, of course, well known that he had an ambition to live and die an Oxford don long before he thought of taking priestly orders.

Before questioning Professor Culler's underlying thesis, I must, for the sake of those who are wondering whether to buy, beg or borrow his book, assure them that his work is efficiently done. He had the privilege of two years' absence from Yale to do it, and he tells us he has handled all the manuscript material preserved in the Birmingham Oratory. He acknowledges, in addition, that he had much help from the late Fr Henry Tristram. Even those readers who are well-read in Newman biographies and well-informed on the details of his life, will find much in this volume that is new to them. Besides an intelligent and fresh use of the Newman manuscripts he shows a wide research into Newman's own sources in this question of education.

Those readers, however, who see more than a new and fascinating life of Newman, written from an unusual angle, will realize that Professor Culler has an axe to grind. Though, as I said, the thesis does not obtrude, he is quite open with his readers.

4 A. D. Culler, *op. cit.*, p. xii.

He tells us his conclusions in his preface. The 'central pattern' of Newman's life, he asserts, is 'not the steady, ineluctable march towards Rome, but an oscillation between intellectual liberalism and a religious submissiveness which revealed itself most dramatically in the five crushing illnesses of Newman's adolescence and early manhood'.<sup>5</sup> Strangely enough, the one great illness everyone knows about, which Newman obviously regarded as of so great importance that he preserved all the details of it for the rest of his life, namely his illness in Sicily, is not one of the 'crushing illnesses' that Professor Culler looks upon as so significant. About this illness, Professor Culler tells us, 'it was not a spiritual crisis at all except as it became such when seen through the mists of fever and in retrospect'. If he is right, was it pure self-deception that made Newman see it all his life as of so great importance?

In the Fr Bouyer edition of the autographical writings, where we see so much of Newman's spiritual life, the Sicily illness is the most important one. Both the amount of space given to it, and his remarks, show this importance. 'I seem to see', he writes, 'and I saw, a strange providence in it.' Later: 'What is here to be noticed is its remarkable bearing on my history, so to call it.'<sup>6</sup> Again, 'I kept asking almost impatiently why God so fought against me.'<sup>7</sup> Again, 'What I wanted first to speak of was the Providence & strange meaning of it. I could almost think the devil saw I am to be a means of usefulness, & tried to destroy me.'<sup>8</sup> Nothing like this amount of attention is given to the earlier illnesses. They merely provoke a sense of gratitude that God saved him from a dangerous temptation. All this makes one wonder whether Professor Culler really understands so much better than did Cardinal Newman the relative importance of the earlier and the Sicilian illnesses.

The professor's thesis rests upon the implied approximation between doctrinal and educational liberalism. I do not remember him ever proving his case. Liberalism is a word notorious for its wide range of meanings and consequent ambiguity, at least apart from its specific context. When Newman was in Oxford, he certainly approximated political liberalism with religious liberalism; but he was equally convinced that educational liberalism need

<sup>5</sup> A. D. Culler, *op. cit.*, *ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> L. Bouyer, *Écrits autobiographiques*, p. 300.

<sup>7</sup> L. Bouyer, *op. cit.*, p. 302.

<sup>8</sup> L. Bouyer, *op. cit.*, *ibid.*

coincide with neither. The Whigs were the great opponents of the Established Church, but they were also, in the persons of the *Edinburgh Review* writers, the protagonists of utilitarianism in education. Both Newman and Coplestone were tory in politics and liberal in educational theory. Newman remained liberal in educational theory, while he was anti-liberal in theology and dogma.

Of course, Professor Culler might here object that it was precisely this inconsistency in Newman's position that led to conflict and illness. Conflict there doubtless was. But was it conflict between educational liberalism and religious devotion? Was it not rather between doctrinal liberalism and dogmatic religion?

If we recall the text of the *Apologia*, where Newman describes his first crisis, it does indeed describe a struggle, and it does end in what Professor Culler calls 'religious submissiveness', but the temptation was anything but mere 'intellectual humanism'. 'When I was fourteen', wrote Newman, 'I read Paine's Tracts against the Old Testament, and found pleasure in thinking of the objections which were contained in them. Also, I read some of Hume's Essays; and perhaps that on Miracles. So at least I gave my Father to understand; but perhaps it was a brag. Also, I recollect copying out some French verses, perhaps Voltaire's, in denial of the immortality of the soul, and saying to myself something like "How dreadful, but how plausible!"'.<sup>9</sup> Whatever might be said of Hume and Voltaire, Paine's Tracts would hardly be examples of 'polite letters'. This passage should be the key to the later reference to 'incipient liberalism'. The passage which, at first sight, might seem most to favour Professor Culler is the one in the early pages of the *Apologia* where Newman says, 'I was beginning to prefer intellectual excellence to moral.'<sup>10</sup> Here, at least, one is tempted to say, is a reflection of Newman's feeling that religion and the pursuit of intellectual excellence are incompatible. But look at the context. What was the 'intellectual excellence' that tempted him? Newman tells us in the preceding paragraph. It was his attempt to prove that the ante-Nicene Fathers were doubtfully orthodox on the Trinity, together with a criticism of some verses of the Athanasian Creed as being unnecessarily scientific, a certain disdain for Antiquity, including flippant language against the

<sup>9</sup> Newman, *Apologia*, ed. 1890, p. 3.

<sup>10</sup> Newman, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

Fathers in an Encyclopaedia article, and an attack on Miracles. Clearly 'intellectual excellence' in this context means simply a certain pride in competent destructive scholarship. There is nothing whatever of 'humanism' in this temptation, any more than there had been in his earlier temptation.

Newman's objection to doctrinal liberalism was not that it was humanistic. Never once does he make any such suggestion. His real objection was precisely that it regarded religion as non-intellectual, not concerned with truth, a mere matter of refinement. If it is true that many humanists do adopt this attitude, and Newman would be the first to admit it, he would never have admitted that they were justified in so doing; and, apart from his adolescent temptations to rationalism, he himself never understood humanism in this way. The origin of the rationalist conviction that religion was unconcerned with truth and knowledge was, according to Newman, Lutheranism, which had led people to look upon faith as 'a feeling, an emotion, an affection, an appetency; and, as this view of Faith obtained, so was the connexion of Faith with Truth and Knowledge more and more either forgotten or denied'.<sup>11</sup> Newman claimed that religion was, on the contrary, deeply concerned with truth and knowledge, and that therefore a truly humanist university had no right to exclude it; since true humanism regarded truth as the proper pursuit of the intellect and a university as existing to make that pursuit possible.

It is not possible, then, to agree with Professor Culler that there is any tension between the two sides of Newman's character in his *Idea of a University*. On this question, there is perfect consistency between the religious and the humanistic discourses. Newman's persistent claim is that religion is not necessarily humanistic, nor humanism necessarily religious; but that there need be no clash between the two. If one studies any science, including theology, out of one's love for the truth, and not for some practical purpose, the result is what is known as liberal knowledge. If, on the other hand, one studies a science, as is normally the case with theology, for the purpose of man's moral improvement, the study ceases to be primarily 'liberal'. Newman never denied the value of utilitarian knowledge. Clearly we must have priests and doctors and scientists, and they must be know-

<sup>11</sup> Newman, *Idea of a University*, ed. 1889, p. 28.

ledgeable in their vocations. But, ideally speaking, the members of these vocations should have a liberal education, as well as their vocational one. Characteristic of their liberal vocation is their study of truth for its own sake; or, as Newman sometimes puts it, because truth, merely as truth, is beautiful. 'Useful knowledge is the possession of truth as powerful, Liberal Knowledge is the apprehension of it as beautiful. Pursue it, either as beauty or as power, to its furthest extent and its true limit, and you are led by either road to the Eternal and Infinite, to the intimations of conscience and the announcements of the Church.'<sup>12</sup>

It may be objected that to deny in Newman all tension between culture and religion is to close one's eyes to his frequently repeated rejection of the religion of humanism, and his expressed conviction of the difficulty felt by the philosopher in the acceptance of revelation. Newman did indeed admit that there was often a great tension, in actual life, between the world of culture and the world of religion. His admission is but a consequence of his acceptance of the doctrine of original sin. There is, of course, nothing peculiar to Newman in this doctrine. Reformation Protestantism has always painted a darker picture of the infirmities and sinfulness of fallen man than Catholicism. Among Catholics, some have been more optimistic than others. The Greek Fathers were, on the whole, more optimistic about the moral capacities of fallen man than were the Latins. The Middle Ages, as represented in the *Imitation of Christ*, were very pessimistic. On the other hand, the medieval tradition represented by St Thomas was, on the whole, more optimistic. Newman was probably somewhere between the two latter traditions. He rejected the Protestant doctrine of essential and utter corruption. Yet, while admitting, with all Catholics, that the world is full of elements of good which can be won over to Christ, he went further than Thomists usually do in admitting that nothing but grace can save men from spoiling God's good creation. Newman speaks of St Philip's vocation 'to sweeten and to sanctify what God had made very good and man had spoilt'.<sup>13</sup>

It was because of the Fall that man found it difficult to admit that he was a sinner, a rebel in this fair world. While culture was

<sup>12</sup> Newman, *op. cit.*, p. 217.

<sup>13</sup> Newman, *op. cit.*, p. 235. Professor Culler's recognition of the significance of this description of St Philip is interesting. He does not seem fully to realize that it damages his thesis.

in itself good, and ought to help man to find God, it often had the effect of making him proud and satisfied with his own achievements. Further, since these achievements commonly could only alter the surface of things, one of the effects of culture, when divorced from deep Christianity, was to make man satisfied with an outward veneer. The outward refinement and easy-going good nature of the 'gentleman' was sufficiently agreeable and compensating to take the place of genuine religion.

Professor Culler argues that, in all such passages, Newman is proclaiming the essential irreligiousness of humanism. Consequently, when he finds that the first of the Oxford University Sermons puts forward the spirit of Christianity as the proper 'single-minded, modest, cautious, and generous spirit' that is so necessary in philosophical researches, he tells us this 'sermon is thoroughly out of character'.<sup>14</sup> Yet there are not wanting numerous passages in the *Idea of a University* where Newman states that humanistic study can be beneficial to the growth of Christianity. He speaks of the 'important aid which intellectual cultivation furnishes to us in rescuing the victims of passion and self-will', in so far as it 'expels the excitements of sense by the introduction of those of the intellect'. Later he says that, from a religious point of view, 'intellectual employments, though they do no more than occupy the mind with objects naturally noble or innocent, have a special claim upon our consideration and gratitude'. Further, he continues, knowledge has 'a natural tendency to refine the mind',<sup>15</sup> which helps it in its struggle against certain forms of evil.

To my mind, an indication that Professor Culler has misunderstood Newman in all this is his tendency to support his argument by identifying humanism with a subjective view of truth, and, on the other hand, utilitarianism with an objective view. If this were true, then a man who had sympathy with both would be a man somewhat divided against himself. The way Professor Culler has arrived at this point of view seems to be as follows. Knowledge is either for some purpose beyond the mind, or it is for the sake of mental refinement. If it is for a purpose beyond the mind, it is objective and utilitarian. If it is for the mind itself, it is subjective and liberal. Professor Culler has some qualms about this distinc-

<sup>14</sup> A. D. Culler, *op. cit.*, p. 234.

<sup>15</sup> All these passages are from Newman's *Idea of a University*, Discourse VIII.

tion; and knows that Newman himself thought that liberal knowledge would at the same time give us useful knowledge about the world. In this we are to believe that Newman was inconsistent. 'How can he be sure', writes Professor Culler, 'that the knowledge which will best refine and discipline the mind will also inform us truly about the external world? Or, to put it another way, how can he be sure that the world has such a character that knowledge of it will constitute the perfection of the mind?'<sup>16</sup>

Professor Culler forgets that in all this Newman is radically Aristotelian. The highest function of man is the contemplation of the truth. This does not mean that truth is subordinated to man's refinement, but rather that man's true purpose, and consequently mental health and refinement, can only come from the contemplation of the objective truth. The knowledge of such truth is not subjective, except in so far as all knowledge is a subjective possession of something objective. Following upon the same misunderstanding, Professor Culler thinks that, when Newman speaks of the attempt of the mind to reduce the world's multiplicity to some philosophical unity, he is thinking, on Kantian lines, of a purely subjective categorizing of reality for the sake of the mind and its vision of beauty. It is almost as though the mind cultivates itself by seeking a beauty within itself, by using as its materials the objective information coming from the world. At one point, Professor Culler is obviously worried about this interpretation, and hastens to assure us that Newman was never actually interested in the theory of knowledge as such.

Can it be maintained that, for Newman, there was any difference between *knowledge* and the *possession of the truth*? The present writer has always understood the words 'knowledge for its own end' as equivalent to 'truth for its own sake'.

Newman's life-long insistence on the importance of *real* as opposed to *notional* assent is a good indication that he was not interested in any subjective, as opposed to objective, view of truth. It is in one of Newman's humanistic passages that he paradoxically asserts: 'Alas! what are we doing all through life, both as a necessity and as a duty, but unlearning the world's poetry, and attaining to its prose! This is our education as boys and as men, in the action of life, and in the closet or library; in our affections, in our aims, in our hopes, and in our memories. And

<sup>16</sup> A. D. Culler, *op. cit.*, p. 218.



in like manner it is the education of our intellect.’<sup>17</sup> What could be a more objective approach than this? The humanistic ideal seeks truth, especially the truth that is most closely related to man. Literature, as Newman insisted, cannot confine itself to the brighter side of human life. It must concern itself with man as he really is, in all his fallen nature. Literature gives us a picture of the truth concerning human life more perfectly than science, and for this reason literature is more humanistic. Both science and theology lead us to truth in their respective spheres. Both can be humanistic to the extent to which they are studied merely out of love for the beauty of truth, of reality. Normally, however, both were studied for important practical reasons, and, to that extent, were normally not humanistic. Since the ‘health’ of man’s natural intellect, good though it is, is not man’s only, nor even his highest, good in this world, a liberal education could never be the only education to satisfy man’s needs. In times of national emergency, it might be necessary for a nation’s survival for many of its intellectuals to specialize in science. In times of widespread ill-health, more people might have to devote themselves to medicine. There is always a need of some theology, and the community requires a proportion of trained theologians. But, ideally speaking, all members of a community capable of it should have the opportunity of a liberal education, just as, on a lower level, all should have a chance of bodily health. It is a result of the Fall, alas, that many of these groups should develop a narrowness of outlook, and fail to recognize the relative importance of the other sciences. Especially is there a danger that the secular sciences may be tempted to rebel against that science that claims to be based upon a revelation that the human mind cannot subordinate to itself.

In Professor Culler’s view, Newman’s ‘philosopher’ is a victim of self-contemplation. Newman would, I am certain, have protested that he was being misunderstood. It is not himself, but the truth, that the philosopher wishes to know. If the world is a unity, and since the world is a unity, the philosopher will never rest content until he sees the why and the how of that unity. It is impossible to imagine anyone being more horrified than Newman at the idea of a philosopher seeking a self-invented and subjective unity of his own. ‘I say’, wrote Newman, ‘that one main portion

<sup>17</sup> cf. H. Tristram, *The Idea of a Liberal Education*, pp. 78–79. Quoted from the *Idea of a University*.

of intellectual education, of the labours of both school and university, is to remove the original dimness of the mind's eye; to strengthen and perfect its vision; to enable it to look out into the world right forward, steadily and truly; to give the mind clearness, accuracy, precision; to enable it to use words aright, to understand what it says, to conceive justly what it thinks about, to abstract, compare, analyse, divide, define, and reason, correctly.<sup>18</sup> If this is not a search for objectivity, then words have no meaning.

To turn back again to the autobiographical memoir, one of its greatest values will be to show us Newman's intellectual integrity. He is interested to remember and preserve the details of his own life. Often enough he wonders why he is doing so, why he keeps all these jottings. He knows they will cause difficulties to his supporters after he has gone. 'How unpleasant', he writes, 'it is to read former memoranda—I can't quite tell why. They read affected, unreal, egotistical, petty, fussy. There is much in the above, which I should tear out and burn, if I did as I wished.'<sup>19</sup> Newman's life had all along been a kind of dialogue with himself in the presence of God. He feels a need to put this dialogue on paper, and refer to it from time to time. Much of it is a complaint that he is getting nothing done. 'I have been startled on considering, that in the last 15 years I have only written two books. . . . What have I been doing with my Time? though I have never been idle.'<sup>20</sup> And all the time he keeps on coming back to the thought of God's providence. 'And He Who has been with me so marvellously all through my life, will not fail me now, I know—though I have no claim upon Him. . . .'<sup>21</sup> The end of the Catholic journal is typical of the dialogue in his heart that continued to the end. 'I am dissatisfied with the whole of this book. It is more or less a complaint from one end to the other. But it represents what has been the real state of my mind, and what my Cross has been. O how light a Cross—think what the Crosses of others are! And think of the compensation, compensation in even this world. . . .'<sup>22</sup> Professor Culler would, I suppose, say that the Newman of the autobiographical writings is the evangelical Newman, always ready to 'grovel in terror' before his Maker, conscious of the

18 cf. H. Tristram, *op. cit.*, *ibid.*

20 L. Bouyer, *op. cit.*, p. 432.

22 L. Bouyer, *op. cit.*, p. 442.

19 L. Bouyer, *op. cit.*, p. 424.

21 L. Bouyer, *op. cit.*, *ibid.*

'awful dark and the blinding bright which lay below and above the tiny, pastoral world of man considered solely as man'.<sup>23</sup> The professor would, of course, insist that this is the authentic Newman. He would be right in implying that this Newman was conscious of an unredeemed part of his nature that could easily be tempted into pride and self-sufficiency. But I do not think he would be right in saying that Newman ever saw in humanism as such the unredeemed or unredeemable pride of the human intellect.

It will be seen from the discussion that both these books will have immense importance for Newmanists. Professor Culler's views certainly deserve serious consideration, and all Newmanists will be grateful for his scholarly and fascinating biography. As for the French edition of the memoirs, it will have value for English Newmanists even after the publication of the English edition of the same. For no one in this country needs to be persuaded of the importance of Fr Bouyer's notes.

23 A. D. Culler, *op. cit.*, p. 230.

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## SIDELIGHTS ON ELECTRONIC COMPUTERS

MICHAEL HOSKIN

**E**LECTRONIC digital computers or 'brains' were originally designed, as we saw previously,<sup>1</sup> for use in the computations which occur in business and in scientific research; they carry out at great speed 'programmes' of elementary arithmetical and logical instructions which have been precisely formulated in advance. But there are many scientists, from linguists on the one hand to neurologists on the other, who are not confronted with heavy computation but who are keenly interested in other applications of electronic computers. In this article I shall discuss briefly a few of these applications, because although they are of less immediate practical importance they are fascinating in themselves, and in one case at least they have helped in the formation of a new discipline, that of cybernetics, which is helping to break down a little of the excessive specialization which is the curse of modern science.

1 'Automation', in *BLACKFRIARS*, October 1956, pp. 423-30.