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## IN SEARCH OF THE IDEA OF A CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY<sup>1</sup>

This text is a historical reconstruction of the circumstances surrounding the establishment of the Catholic University of Ireland by John Henry Newman in the 1850s. Although the university functioned for only thirty years and did not gain a permanent place in the history of higher education, the motives behind its founding, the difficulties encountered on its way, and especially the attempts to justify the need for its establishment are still useful and instructive today. Attention to this modest episode in the history of Catholic higher education is needed because of the fundamental dilemma every denominational school needs to face – namely the tension between knowledge acquisition and moral character formation. However, regardless of this reason, the establishment of the university in Dublin would be worth considering for that reason alone as it was when one of the most beautiful books on university education, *The Idea of a University*, was written<sup>2</sup>. This brief return to history will make it possible to understand the main lines of argumentation of *The Idea of a University*, its strengths, and weaknesses in better way.

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<sup>1</sup> This article was first published in the monthly publication called *Znak* (11 (606) 2005, pp. 58–78). It was one of the interviews found in the issue entitled *Are Catholic Universities out of date?* After 17 years, I returned to this text, which, I believe, has not lost its relevance. As this text was published in a non-scientific journal in 2005, it could not enter the academic community, it was not discussed or quoted in the pedagogical environment. I believe that its inclusion into academic environment will be beneficial both from the point of view of the history of education and university pedagogy. Having read it once again, I decided that only one change should be introduced: the title of the previously binding *Act on education system* should be replaced with the title of the currently binding act – *the Education Law*. The article has also been supplemented with the bibliography.

<sup>2</sup> The translation of *The Idea of a University* into the Polish language, prepared by Paweł Mroczkowski, was published in 1990.

## THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF IRELAND

Great Britain in the mid-nineteenth century resembled today's United States in many respects: a world power with a strong economy, a huge global influence, and great political aspirations. As Newman wrote, it *was able to conquer the earth and rule over Catholics* (Newman, 1990, p. 221). From the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the state religion was Anglicanism, with the monarch as the head of the Church. Other religions, including Roman Catholicism, were legally and socially disadvantaged and their congregations treated as second-class citizens. It was ironically said at the time that Catholics were a mission of Roman priests among Irish dockworkers. One of the manifestations of the defect of non-Anglicans was the effectively enforced prohibition on studying at prestigious English universities, which was related to the student's obligation to take an oath of allegiance to the Anglican doctrine – for non-Anglican youth, such an oath was tantamount to renouncing their own faith. The situation was even worse in Ireland, then under the British rule. This religious defect was combined with political dependence, and the emerging nationalist movement was hostile to everything that was English. Newman was aware that social discrimination against Catholics is caused by absence of education. In *The Idea of a University*, he wrote: *Robbed, oppressed, and thrust aside, Catholics in these islands have not been in a condition for centuries to attempt the sort of education which is necessary for the man of the world, the statesman, the landholder, or the opulent gentleman. [...] The time is come when this moral disability must be removed* (Newman, *The Idea of a University*, Preface).

This change was possible, i.e., thanks to the creation of solid Catholic secondary education, and in the future, the access to higher education institutions for Catholics. In a way, Newman's words echoed what influential British politicians had been saying and doing for a long time. In the spring of 1845, Robert Peel, when pursuing his conciliatory policy towards the Irish, pushed through the Parliament an act to establish in Dublin a secular and non-denominational Royal University of Ireland, Queen's College, which became a counterbalance to the Anglican Trinity College with religious criteria still in force. It was a gesture of goodwill by the British authorities towards Irish Catholics, who until then had been deprived of the opportunity to study at a higher education institution in their country. Not only were Peel's educational reforms focused on the educational emancipation of the Irish, but also continued the wider process of moving away from traditional university education, in which the greatest importance was attached to students' "religious correctness". The University of London, founded in 1827, was a non-denominational institution; similar changes, on Peel's initiative, but after his death, were introduced between 1852–1854 in Oxford, leading to the relaxation and then complete abolition of the requirement of the Anglican religion for students admitted to the university. Let us add that not all the then students and lecturers were as open as the British reformer and the inscriptions *Down with Peel* have been preserved on the walls of some Oxford colleges to date.

The changes in the university system were beneficial to Catholics, which is why so many Irish people welcomed the establishment of the Queen's College. It turned out, however, that the enthusiasm of a significant part of the intellectual elite was not shared by the Catholic hierarchy. Most of the bishops, with the strong support of Pope Pius IX, expressed objections to the possibility of Catholics studying at a non-denominational university. The reason was simple – in their opinion, the so-called mixed and liberal education could prove dangerous to the faith and morals of young Catholics. This danger was supposed to result from the university's non-denominational nature, i.e. a neutral and equal treatment of all religions and an “uncontroversial” approach to faith. Having rejected the British offer, the Catholic bishops turned out to be extremely exclusive. Instead, they initiated a project to establish a Catholic university modelled to resemble the Belgian Louvain. In 1850, the Founding Committee was formed, headed by Cardinal Paul Cullen. Originally, Newman was not taken into consideration as a candidate for the rector of this university. He was only asked to come to Dublin to deliver a few lectures on university education, justifying the need to establish a Catholic university. It was hoped that Newman's erudition and intellectual authority would convince educated Irish Catholics of the idea, especially those who viewed the Queen's College in a favourable manner and were not interested in making contributions to the new project pursued by the Church. Newman accepted the invitation and met with Cardinal Cullen several times regarding this issue. As a result, both parties decided that the best thing for the future university would be to pass the responsibility for its establishment to Newman. Newman's decision was probably influenced by the fact that people talked a lot at that time about the episcopate being prepared for him, and success in establishing the university would probably bring him closer to this dignity.

When facing this task, Newman had to respond to three kinds of expectations. Firstly, there were the expectations of the pro-English part of the Catholic hierarchy in Ireland, with its leader, the already mentioned Cardinal Cullen. The cardinal requested that Newman be firmly in favour of denominational education, and therefore, against the idea of neutral and non-denominational education proposed by the Queen's College. When thinking of a university, Cullen was really thinking of a seminary, expecting similar care in the material selection, a similar profile of lecturers and a similar discipline of studies. Cullen also had another expectation – he wanted Newman to not allow a strong centre of Irish nationalism within the university, which was related to the need to select the right staff, favouring English clergymen or those Irish clergymen who did not oppose the English rule on the Isle. As the future would show, the relationship with Cardinal Cullen proved to be the most difficult aspect of Newman's job. The reason, as Newman himself recalled many years later, was not so much an insurmountable disagreement as to the idea of a university as the cardinal's inherent distrust. According to Newman, the cardinal *makes no one his friend, because he will confide in no body, and be considerate to no body. It was a wonder*

*really he did not cook his own dinners, he was so distrustful of everyone* (Ker, 1988, p. 461)<sup>3</sup>. During the period of seven years when Newman was engaged with founding the university, the main problem in his relationship with Cullen was that the cardinal did not respond to his letters and avoided any official declarations and formal commitments, both regarding Newman and the university itself. Newman bitterly noted that Cullen wanted to treat him like a secretary who was told only what was necessary at the time, expecting complete obedience as part of his assignments. It was so frustrating that it was one of the reasons why Newman resigned from his function as rector.

The second type of expectations Newman had to respond to was related to the Irish nationalist movement. For this movement, the most important thing was that the university established by Newman should be an Irish institution, with English influences limited to the minimum. Nationalists did not focus on the issue of denominational and non-denominational nature of education, but on the issue of its national character, they did not see the main threat in a neutral approach to faith, but in a neutral approach to tradition and national identity. In the Irish episcopate, this movement was represented by Oliver MacHale, Archbishop of Tuam. MacHale did not trust Cullen and correctly – considered him a man who disliked the Irish. It seems that this reluctance did not concern the nation as such, but only its liberating aspirations, which, in Cullen's opinion, significantly hindered the dialogue between Rome and London and the possible return of Great Britain to the bosom of the Catholic Church. MacHale distrusted Cullen not only because of his pro-English orientation; he also believed that Cullen was aiming at the complete subordination of the university and depriving other bishops of the possibility of influencing its affairs. So MacHale was accusing Cullen of exactly the same as Newman. However, the nationalists were not defenceless in this situation. Their strength was that they, through a developed network of parishes and zealous lay people, collected the largest sums among poor Irish Catholics for the university's maintenance. In a situation where the small Irish aristocracy did not support the idea of establishing a Catholic university, the entire financial burden of establishing and running the university fell on the shoulders of the poor inhabitants of the island. Let us add that English Catholics, although convinced of the importance of religious education, were not actively involved in supporting the University of Dublin, seeing it as an Irish rather than a Catholic institution. As an Englishman, Newman clearly felt the distrust of MacHale, although the archbishop himself officially supported his candidacy for the position of rector, probably seeing it as a counterbalance to Cullen's influence.

Finally, the third type of expectations that Newman faced was put forward by the opponents of religious education. Anyway, it is difficult to talk about any specific expectations, other than to resign from establishing such a university

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<sup>3</sup> The factographic report on the founding of the Catholic University in Dublin by J. H. Newman is based herein mainly on the outstanding book by I. Ker.

altogether. According to the representatives of this option, it was necessary to accept the compromise proposals put forward by the British and agree to educate the youth in a non-denominational spirit. Such a formula of higher education would be in line with the formula of education in primary and secondary schools adopted in the Irish Education Act of 1831 and implemented by Minister for Ireland Edward Stanley. According to the act, all children on the island, regardless of their religion, received a government grant for education. Even if this act of “British generosity” was not appreciated by everyone, most of them realized that, from a financial point of view, it was the only way to educate Irish children. The Queen’s College was therefore a logical confirmation of the existing status quo and fully met the needs existing in the country; it would therefore be unjustifiable and financially irresponsible to establish a Catholic university. This resistance also resulted from the conviction that the idea of a religious university is an anachronism and that when such respectable universities as Oxford move away from the idea of denominational education and open up to more and more groups of students, regardless of their religion, it is difficult to find a justification for denominational education. Although this group did not have a decisive voice in the Irish Church, its influence on the further fate of the university was, at least indirectly, significant. As well, its members included mostly educated and wealthy people who could afford to send their sons to the university, and it was they who, as Newman expected, were to become the source of the university’s financial stability. Meanwhile, the Irish aristocracy was more interested in sending their children to study in England or abroad than in Dublin.

Satisfying the expectations of these three groups was possible only by persuading each of them to compromise. The proposal for such a compromise was already outlined in the first lectures given by Newman in Dublin in 1852, and then was addressed to all parties in the course of everyday work on establishing a university.

As for Cardinal Cullen, Newman struggled to persuade him to be more open to the idea of a university as a university of knowledge. By going along with the idea of a religious university, Newman emphasized that university education cannot be identical to seminary education, and students cannot be treated in the same way as seminarians. Cullen, for example, often accused Newman (and informed Rome of his objections) that discipline was too loose among the students, that young boys smoked cigars, went to dances, and rode horses. Is it moral, he used to ask, when they are provided for and depend on poor widows’ contributions? Newman, although far from giving up discipline, pointed out that an element of any education, whether religious or any other, is to acquire certain life skills that determine human culture, and to do this – one needs freedom. Another, much more important, question was related to freedom - to what extent can a Catholic university be free to conduct studies other than theology? What are the limits of academic freedom, research, and inquiry, for example in the field of literature, history, or medicine? This was the most important point – the conviction of the

distrustful cardinal that there was no contradiction between secular and theological disciplines, that faith and reason were not in conflict. Proven examples of education at the best English universities confirm that students' talents can be fully revealed only in an atmosphere of freedom, and the knowledge acquired by them will turn out to be the most creative. There is no contradiction, as Newman argued, between religious education and reasonable freedom.

With regard to MacHale and the Irish nationalists, Newman took a different stance. Bearing in mind that the most difficult thing for them to accept was the presence of Englishmen at the university which reminded them not only of the intellectual but also political dependence of Ireland, Newman tried to offer university positions primarily to Irish clergymen and laymen. This was not always possible due to the lack of suitably qualified candidates, but this trend in Newman's behaviour was clear and consistent. Newman also willingly filled administrative positions at the university with Irishmen. When pursuing this policy, he also wanted to entrust the Irish laity with the management of university's financial issues; he consistently strived for this, postulating the establishment of a three-member committee of lay people responsible for this aspect of university life. Such a committee would not only be in MacHale's favour, since by exercising control over university funds it would remind people who the main university benefactor is, but also in Newman's favour, since it would limit the influence of Cardinal Cullen. Cullen, however, was not going to agree to such a solution and give up control over the university's cash inflows and expenses. He was wary of both this and other Newman's other personnel proposals. Let us add that in an attempt to win over nationalists to the idea of a university, Newman, wherever possible, sought to introduce Irish culture and literature studies into the curriculum.

Finally, towards the third group of opponents who questioned the need for a Catholic university in general, Newman used two tactics. Firstly, he directly called upon the authority of the pope, saying that his will was binding for Catholics and guaranteed that the project was necessary and would be successful. Indeed, Pope Pius IX consistently supported the idea of establishing a Catholic university and was hostile to non-denominational education. However, the argument of obedience was not a strong one, and Newman did not overuse it. Forcing this argument would have to end up in taking up the issue of papal infallibility, which in those days, in view of the growing influence of the ultramontanes and the real possibility of a very broad definition of dogmatic infallibility, would be in Newman's eyes – by all means – undesirable. It seems that Newman realistically assessed the pope's knowledge of the situation in Ireland from the very beginning of the project, but years later he directly noticed that the pope was unaware of this situation and that he probably made a mistake when deciding upon the university. Newman's second, much more persuasive, argument was the concern for the quality of education. Newman knew that if anything could attract the Irish elite to a Catholic university, it would be the high level of studies which had to be comparable to the quality of education at the best universities in England

and on the continent in order to convince parents that it was more profitable to educate young people in Dublin than abroad. Newman, therefore, tried to employ outstanding professors who could attract youth and unite opponents with their authority. A significant part of its personnel came from the Oxford Movement – they were converts who, following Newman's example, in the 1940s switched from the Anglican Church to the Catholic Church. In 1854, Newman hired, e.g., Peter le Page Renouf, the world-renowned Egyptologist about whom Lord Acton said that was the most educated Englishman he knew; and in 1856 he entrusted the Department of English to Thomas Arnold Junior.

The most important question Newman was facing was: How to start? Modestly and gradually, starting with one or two faculties, and then gradually developing? Or maybe on a grand and spectacular scale, creating all faculties with full academic and administrative staff at once? Newman himself favoured the first possibility. In his opinion, it was more reasonable, if for no other reason as it did not slow down the whole undertaking. Opening a university with a number of faculties would have to involve a long fund-raising process and ultimately result in further delays. Finally, the university was opened in November 1854 with a group of excellent professors and a handful of students. In 1856, Newman appeared at the synod of Irish bishops, presenting further faculties of the university's development. He demanded among other things that the ties between the university and secondary schools be strengthened and students for new difficult state examinations in the field of engineering, civil service and colonial functions in India be prepared. He especially called for creating a medical faculty, which was supposed to become the best medical school in the city. His further plans included the opening of an archaeological institute and an observatory. Newman's plans gained the full approval of the bishops, the rules of university operation and the budget for the next three years were approved. It was a period of Newman's particular satisfaction with his work. In a sense, he was creating a Catholic Oxford in Dublin, not the Oxford that was liberalizing and departing from religious criteria at the same time, but the one he remembered from his youth – full of deep knowledge and religious fervour, where the issues of faith and morality aroused genuine interest of students and lecturers. The only difference was that the university in Dublin was Catholic, while Oxford was Anglican.

Newman's enthusiasm quickly collided with the fundamental problem faced by the young university – too few candidates for studies. In mid-1856, only ninety-six students were enrolled. Neither the Americans nor the English, who had been counted on, showed up – the wealthy Irish kept sending their sons abroad. Moreover, as for the Irish, Newman suspected that, in addition to poverty, which objectively inhibited the influx of young people to the university, there were other reasons, especially the inherent aversion and suspicion of many Irish bishops and clergymen towards science. *They think* – he wrote – *that then only Ireland will become again the Isle of Saints, when it has a population of peasants ruled over by a patriotic priesthood patriarchally* (Ker, p. 442–443). To improve the

situation, Newman sought to create scholarship funds, but this solution could not fundamentally change the status quo. The reason why the university attracted so few applicants was also the fact that it was not authorised to confer academic titles. Newman repeatedly applied to the education authorities for such permissions, but each time he was refused and met rejection. He was explained to that while the university remained denominational, he could not expect any authorizations like these. Newman tried to circumvent this difficulty by seeking possibilities of affiliating the university with an already existing and fully-fledged university; he also considered moving the Faculty of Humanities to England. These attempts, however, ended in failure. There were other difficulties as well. Newman never held the full-time post of rector and always shared his time between Dublin and Birmingham, where he led the oratory. With each year he felt more tired. His long periods of absence from the university increasingly annoyed Cardinal Cullen and may have been the reason why Newman's candidacy for bishop was blocked.

In 1857, Newman, tired of six years of work, wrote an official letter to the bishops and decided to resign from the position of rector. For some time both sides tried to find any *modus vivendi*, but eventually it became clear that the Irish had to fend for themselves. Never did the university reach the level that Newman had wanted: to its very end it struggled with financial difficulties, was not accredited, and above all, did not attract students. It functioned until 1883, when it was taken over by the Jesuits and renamed the University College.

This modest episode would probably have gone unnoticed if not for Newman's series of lectures on the idea of a university. Nine lectures, five of which were given as a kind of introduction to the project, and the next four were written "on the way", became a permanent part of a philosophical and pedagogical reflection on higher education. The first lecture was given on May 10, 1852. As Newman was preaching, he was growing gradually more convinced that he was gaining attention of his audience for the presented idea. Newman gave a total number of five lectures in May and June 1852, in which he outlined the assumptions of university education. He prepared the next four lectures later, but never had the opportunity to deliver them in Ireland. In November 1852 the whole piece was completed and compiled into one volume, and the book was published in February 1853. Although, from a literary point of view Newman greatly appreciated those lectures, from an intellectual point of view – he was frustrated. As he wrote himself, he felt *like a navigator on a strange sea, who is out of sight of land, is surprised by night, and has to trust mainly to the rules and instruments of his science for reaching the port* (Newman, *The Idea of a University*, Discourse 9).

Today, it is difficult to imagine a discussion on the essence of university education without the reference to Newman's text, *it is impossible not to refer to it when one wants to say anything about the university* (Stróżewski, 1992, p. 7). However, when reading *The Idea of a University*, one should remember about the context in which it was created. In his lectures, Newman conducts two parallel implicative debates, arguing on the one hand with Cardinal Cullen, and on the other



– with those Irish intellectuals who were opposed to religious education. These debates do overlap, interpenetrate, influence each other and, above all, clash with each other, giving the impression that their intention is to exclude each other. On the one hand, Newman defends university education, and on the other hand, he shows its weaknesses. On the one hand, he opposes all the attempts to limit the freedom of scientific research, and on the other hand he proves that the knowledge that results from this research cannot become the man's ultimate goal. This "fight on two fronts" is the most important feature of *The Idea of a University*. Without being aware of it, it is impossible to understand the message of the entire book. It is interesting that Newman was not asked by the Irish bishops to provide such a broad reflection on university education, but only to justify the need to establish a Catholic university. He was not expected to consider the general idea of a university, but only to reject the concept of non-denominational education in a firm manner. It was this task he had been assigned and he was only accountable for. So we can say that "the second front", the default debate with Cardinal Cullen, was created by Newman himself, that it was necessary not for the bishops, but for him to convey a message to listeners and readers that could counterbalance the message of "the first front" and convince them that the idea of a Catholic university in its basic features does not oppose to the idea of a university in general, that religious education and non-denominational education are based on the same foundations – respect for knowledge and the pursuit of truth. Newman was obedient to the bishops, but he also wanted to teach them something, he fulfilled his commitment, but at the same time he said much more. However, was this ambitious task of conducting two, to some extent, parallel and intellectually mutually exclusive debates possible to accomplish? This is an important question, as when reading *The Idea of a University*, one can get the impression that none of the debates was completed. The praise of university education stops at the point where we would expect the sincere pursuit of knowledge to be recognized as an end in itself, a vocation independent of all external influences. But Newman fails to say that. Nor does he say that university education is secondary to moral character formation, and that what really matters is a god-fearing and conscientious life, not a scientific inquiry, which could in fact be dispensed with. No debate is therefore completed in the sense that no final conclusions are drawn from it. Is this a weakness of Newman's text? In the dispute between Cardinal Cullen and the opponents of religious education, should Newman, in line with the Irish bishops' expectations, proclaim a clear cardinals' victory? Or maybe the essence of a Catholic university lies precisely in this fragile balance between freedom of scientific inquiry and concern for the moral formation of students? But what would this balance consist of?

By addressing Cardinal Cullen implicatively, Newman outlines a vision of university education in which knowledge is studied for its own sake, and truth is the ultimate reward for the scholar's and student's efforts. University education is understood as the practice of liberated reason, which examines connections between

the facts rather than the facts themselves. For a scientific activity to be effective, it must be autonomous: the university does not allow any bias, even bias resulting from the best intentions. When studying scientific issues, we must be free from utilitarian considerations, i.e., we must not ask what benefits we will get out of it – in fact, the benefit is the study itself, it expands the horizons of our mind and makes us become philosophers in the most general sense. Newman sums it up this way: *In fact, the purpose of university education is not to acquire some amount of knowledge needed to practice a profession, but to develop a lifelong thinking habit characterized by freedom, fair judgment, calmness and moderation of reaction, wisdom; [...] what arises is what in one of the earlier lectures I allowed myself to call the habit of philosophical thinking* (Stróżewski, 1992, p. 182).

This is what distinguishes university from vocational schools, which educate professionals competent in one field of knowledge or practice. It is this part of Newman's argument that contemporary authors praising the university most often refer to. Among others, Kazimierz Twardowski and Sergiusz Hessen spoke in the same spirit, and today Władysław Stróżewski and Jerzy Brzeziński repeat it (Twardowski, 1933, chapter 3; Hessen, 1997, p. 382; Stróżewski, 1992, p. 7; Brzeziński, 1994, p. 26). Official documents on university education, such as the Bologna Declaration or the Erfurt Declaration also share these arguments. One might say that modern advocates of university repeat what Newman wanted to say to Cardinal Cullen. Perhaps no one has emphasized the beauty of education for the sake of education more than Newman – education as an intellectual adventure. In this sense, Newman's text is timeless and no one who wants to deal with the issue of university education can skip it.

This argument, however, does not exhaust the problem of *The Idea of a University*. Newman addressed his words not only to Cardinal Cullen, but also to opponents of denomination education; when he took up the office of rector, his intention was not to establish any university – but to establish a Catholic university. By justifying the sense of founding such a university, Newman put forward the thesis that university knowledge is not and cannot be the ultimate goal of a man, that despite its beauty and nobility, it must be subject to an order of a different kind, the sources of which do not stem from the intellect, but from faith. Newman places university knowledge on the throne, but does not crown it, because it is not sovereign; it does not have the last word. Newman seems to say that man's ultimate vocation is not to contemplate knowledge, but to contemplate God. Therefore, a man should be more concerned with the preservation of the moral order than with the pursuit of the truth. What is the conclusion? The best way of intellectual development is to study at a Catholic university, because this is the only guarantee that in the course of gaining knowledge and expanding one's own mental horizons a young person will not get lost and will not lose the moral signpost that will surely lead him to salvation and redemption. This part of Newman's argument is not taken up with the same enthusiasm today as the part quoted above. On the contrary, it is pushed to the margin, as it does not fit into the general image of a university

as a place where science is practiced free of all influences, including church influences. Paradoxically, the main subject of *The Idea of a University*, which is the defence of religious education, finds little recognition in the eyes of university people. Meanwhile, it is this part of the argument that seems to be the most interesting, and certainly arouses the most controversy today.

Newman wrote that the university *still has the office of intellectual education; but the Church steadies it in the performance of that office* (Newman, *The Idea of a University*, Preface). Regardless of whether the university operates within church structures or outside them, its basic task is the same – intellectual education of young people studying there. However, a Catholic university has the advantage over a non-Catholic university – it calms the excited intellect of its students. In other words, Newman believes that intellectual education conducted under the Church auspices is better as it is safer. What danger does it prevent? Generally, it is about the attitude that Newman calls in many places the usurpation of reason. He wrote about it both in *The Idea of a University* and in other texts. In the fourth sermon of the collection of fifteen *University sermons*, entitled *Usurpations of reason*, the following passage is found: *In this day, then, we see a very extensive development of an usurpation which has been preparing, with more or less of open avowal, for some centuries, – the usurpation of Reason in morals and religion. In the first years of its growth it professed to respect the bounds of justice and sobriety: it was little in its own eyes; but getting strength, it was lifted up; and casting down all that is called God, or worshipped, it took its seat in the temple of God, as His representative* (Newman, *The Usurpations of Reason*, par. 15).

The usurpation of reason involves undertaking intellectual investigations where it is necessary to accept the pronouncements of the Church authority in obedience. Newman believes that not everything can be discussed – that there are such truths that must be accepted in faith and acknowledged even when they cannot be understood and explained. A non-denominational university does not have the tools to equip students with such attitudes, hence it often happens that young people enter the areas reserved for faith and try to reason in matters that should not be reasoned about. Being unable to understand one truth or another, they fall into doubt and depart from the faith entirely. A Catholic University, on the contrary, makes sure that the truths of faith are carefully passed on to young people studying there. Newman suggests that the university catholicity is a kind of “firewall” that prevents students from content that turns out to be attractive to their reason but may prove disastrous to their faith and morals. Let’s say that today this argument, very clear in the mid-nineteenth century as an expression of Christianity’s defence against the attacks of Enlightenment intellectuals, seems a bit anachronistic. The atmosphere of contemporary intellectual life, and therefore also the debates held at universities, do not, in any way, remind of a deadly battle in which faith and reason stand against each other. The issue of the relationship between faith and reason is touched upon at universities exceptionally, certainly not

as a subject of controversy, but rather as a topic of works on the history of philosophy and theology. The time when the university was a place of struggle against religion has irretrievably passed. The reconciliation between faith and reason was the result of many causes, which do not need to be discussed now. What is important is the realization that the basic danger that Newman warned students going to a non-Catholic university against no longer exists today. But it is not just about protecting a young man from the dangers of an unbridled mind. Newman says something more – namely that the immediate goal of a Catholic university is not science, art, professional skills, knowledge of literature, access to authentic knowledge, but some profit. What kind of profit? Spiritual flourishing and the possibility of better fulfilment of life tasks, liberation in the spiritual and social dimension at the same time. The meaning of what Newman says comes down to the assumption that a university should take responsibility not only for broadening the student's mental horizons, but also moral life. A non-denomination university fails to do this, as it remains neutral towards the moral values professed by its students. For the authorities of such a university, it does not matter whether the student is a Catholic, a Protestant, a Jehovah's Witness, or an atheist. As long as the student respects state law and the university's internal law, he/she can study without restrictions. Newman challenges this point of view, by saying that by limiting to the transmission of knowledge and neglecting issues of morality and faith, the best thing a non-denominational university can achieve is to form a gentleman. The description of a gentleman and his contrast with a man of faith is one of the most striking and most quoted passages in *The Idea of a University*. Newman wrote: *It is well to be a gentlemen, it is well to have a cultivated intellect, a delicate taste, a candid, equitable, dispassionate mind, a noble and courteous bearing in the conduct of life; – these are the connatural qualities of a large knowledge; they are the objects of a University; I am advocating, I shall illustrate and insist upon them; but still, I repeat, they are no guarantee for sanctity or even for conscientiousness, they may attach to the man of the world, to the profligate, to the heartless, – pleasant, alas, and attractive as he shows when decked out in them* (Newman, *The Idea of a University*, Discourse 5).

While drawing this picture, and especially when recalling the figure of an educated and dissolute man at the same time, Newman had before his eyes the figure of Edward Gibbon, a British historian, the author of an extremely popular history of ancient Rome. His genius went hand in hand with disbelief and a dissolute lifestyle. Moreover, Newman mentioned Gibbon later in the book using his name, similarly as he did in his other books, e.g., in the aforementioned *University sermons*, where Voltaire appeared alongside Gibbon in the same context. Newman argues that if we leave university education to secular colleges, it is uncertain that people like Gibbon and Voltaire, intelligent and brilliant, yet demoralized and cynical about the truths of faith, will not leave them. The answer to this part of Newman's argument is not as obvious as the answer to his postulate concerning the usurpation of reason. In fact, we touch here the very essence of religious

education – care for the acquisition of knowledge not at the expense of spiritual life. Newman makes it clear – and I think all modern supporters of religious education will acknowledge this – that the key thing in the education of young people is the formation of their character in accordance with the values of the religion they practice and professes. Intellectual development is only a part of this process and cannot dominate it. The consequence of this assumption is the recognition that in a situation of conflict between the sphere of knowledge and the sphere of morality, the primacy is vested in the latter. In practice, this means that one should then submit one's intellect to the judgments of the Church's authority and, if necessary, either withdraw from the conducted research or not undertake it at all. It can therefore be said that religious education ultimately comes down to the question of obedience. This obedience does not need to be a bad thing – it is often a natural attitude of the religious mind, so obvious to a young man that is not felt or experienced as any ailment. It cannot be presumed that the tension between the acquisition of knowledge and the expectation of the Church is constant; on the contrary – it seems that it appears exceptionally. Nevertheless, Newman expects a denominational college to guard and protect its students against various forms of religious and moral “derailment” in a conflict situation.

One cannot avoid the impression that Newman's argument on this point is rather superficial. It is based on the assumption that non-denominational universities will educate Gibbons and Voltaires, while denominational universities will educate righteous and conscientious people. Apart from the question of whether we need graduates like Gibbon and Voltaire, let our attention be directed to the fact that Newman is extremely exclusivist in his reasoning, applies righteous character traits and religious faith only to the Catholic Church, not taking account of the fact that there is a huge mass of believers outside the Catholic Church, as well as other noble and righteous people who do not identify themselves with any faith and religion. Certainly, when Newman wrote these words, many such people were leaving the Anglican Trinity College or the non-denominational Queen's College. The belief that only Catholic formation can result in a good Christian and conscientious person is an intellectual abuse. Newman is justified by the historical context in which these words were written. It is important to realize that in the mid-nineteenth century the Catholic Church was still fighting the principle of freedom of conscience. In the encyclical *Quanta cura* of 1864, Pope Pius IX wrote of many who, *from which totally false idea of social government they do not fear to foster that erroneous opinion, most fatal in its effects on the Catholic Church and the salvation of souls, called by Our Predecessor, Gregory XVI, an “insanity,” that “liberty of conscience and worship is each man's personal right, which ought to be legally proclaimed and asserted in every rightly constituted society* (Pius IX, *QUANTA CURA* | *O błędach modernizmu*).

Today, these rights and privileges are formulated and promulgated in the laws of democratic societies, being a constitutional guarantee and declaration of freedom of both believers and non-believers. One of the expressions of this guarantee

includes non-denominational universities, independent and autonomous from the Church authority. Because they are non-denominational, do they remain blind to the moral dimension of educating young people? Certainly not. No reasonable person will argue that university education, and in fact – all education, should be isolated from the spiritual development of a man. For example, Zbigniew Kwieciński, who wrote about pedagogical studies, pointed out: *Therefore, educational studies as research, education of pedagogues and teachers are not only mastering a specific canon of knowledge and a scientific method appropriate for a given academic discipline, [...] but are also its constant crossing at the same time, they are the way to wisdom and ethics, i.e. to independent understanding of the world, discovering another man and helping him/her in resolving the most important moral dilemmas* (Kwieciński, 2000, p. 266).

Does this description bear any resemblance to that of the gentleman in *The Idea of a University*? It is easy to notice that people's moral attitudes result from very different sources – neither belonging to Church guarantees nobility, nor remaining outside of it degrades anyone morally. The exclusivism so strongly present in Newman's text belongs to the history of the Church, similarly as the conviction that there is no salvation outside Church. Today's communities, including university communities, are deeply ethical without being formally Catholic. The universal principles of ethics, to which basic acts of state law refer, such as the Polish law on education, prove that non-denominational education is not morally unstable. However, if the concern for the students' moral formation has been experienced by every university, then the question should be asked about the contemporary justification for establishing Catholic universities. Newman's arguments seem to be of little use here.

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### *In search of the idea of a Catholic university*

#### **Summary**

**Aim:** The author hereof pursued two goals. In the first part, the history of founding a Catholic university in Dublin in the mid-nineteenth century by John Henry Newman was presented, while in the second part the author presented two key issues taken up by Newman in his well-known and respected work entitled *The Idea of a University* – the question of the value of, firstly, liberal education and, secondly, denominational education.

**Methods:** The methods used by the author are situated in the field of the history and philosophy of education. The historical dimension is the reconstruction of the facts accompanying Newman’s activity in Dublin, while the philosophical dimension – the analysis of selected threads of the paper entitled: *The Idea of a University* and the reflection on their relevance in modern times.

**Results:** As a result of the conducted research, the complexity of the social and religious situation in which the English clergyman operated, as well as the strengths and weaknesses of the arguments included in above-mentioned paper were clearly revealed.

**Keywords:** a Catholic university, *The Idea of a University*, liberal education, denominational education.