
BRIEFLY REVIEWED

Rise and Progress of Universities and Benedictine Essays. By John Henry Newman. Introduction and Notes by Mary Katherine Tillman. University of Notre Dame Press. \$45.

The Introduction by the editor describes Newman in his role as the first Rector of the University of Ireland in Dublin. Having given his lectures on the idea of a university in 1852, Newman sets out to turn his idea into a reality. He sets up an in-house publication, the *Catholic University Gazette*, to communicate with those in the university and with the public. In doing so, Newman is dealing with a practical problem, namely, that many of the Irish do not think the project of an Irish University can succeed, though they admit that it is a noble project. Newman sees his role, then, as igniting the imagination of the Irish.

Writing about the rise and progress of universities as a man who has personally experienced the traditions of the University of Oxford both as a student and a tutor, Newman begins his account. Almost like a novelist, he depicts scenes of ancient Greece, where young men cross land and sea to place themselves at the feet of the famous teachers of Athens. What animates them? The thirst for the knowledge the great teachers possess. The university is a response to our natural desire to

know reality as a whole and so be able to think as free men rather than as slaves. In his essays, Newman shows what this natural desire for knowledge looks like. It is one of youthful enthusiasm engaging great teachers amid all the opportunities and dangers of a great city.

The editor includes an account of Newman meeting informally with the first class of the Irish University, consisting of about 20 students. A participant recalls how Newman, after making some comments on the great work before them, closes with the speech of Henry V to his troops on the eve of the great battle of Agincourt. Newman set them on fire with his quiet but deep enthusiasm. Yet we know that while Henry V won his battle, John Henry lost his. The odds for a Catholic university in Dublin, of which he was always aware, proved too steep. He failed to ignite the enthusiasm of the Irish bishops and the public. Though he was certainly disappointed by this failure, it is doubtful that he regretted his enthusiasm. To do so would have been to doubt his conviction that a university ultimately derives its justification from the enthusiasm of students and teachers for learning. (Yes, one can grow cynical about this truth, observing how universities may turn against the Church, how students may become only job-seekers and professors career-chasers.)

Newman closes his collection of images about the university with the educational efforts of the Benedictines, who kept the taste for learning alive in the centuries following the fall of Rome. The monks, men who had fled from the great cities and towns in

order to save their souls, lived their lives in expectation of the world to come. They worked at their manuscripts in the same steady way they worked the land. When the day was done, they said their prayers and went to bed, not worried about what they had done the day before and not having any great plans for the next day. They would continue to do what they had been doing, content to stay in one place until they died. The example of the monks is instructive. While they were "intellectual" only to the extent that religious instruction requires, they formed the bridge between the idea of a university in pagan Greece and the rise of the university in the Christian Middle Ages. That was not their aim, but it was God's aim. It was this attitude of "involved detachment" that animated Newman. Having the dream of intellectual excellence in Dublin, he heeded the call of duty and took his chances.

Richard Geraghty

The Church and the Land. By Vincent McNabb, O.P. *IHS Press* (757-423-0324 or *ihspress.com*). 187 pages. \$14.95.

Fr. Vincent McNabb (1868-1943) was one of that outstanding group of British Catholics of the first half of the 20th century which included such luminaries as G.K. Chesterton, Hilaire Belloc, Ronald Knox, Frank Sheed, and J.R.R. Tolkien. McNabb entered the Dominican Order in 1885 and was ordained in 1891.

He later taught Thomistic philosophy at several Dominican houses of study and at the University of London, delivered radio talks over the BBC, gave open-air addresses on behalf of the Catholic Evidence Guild, and wrote many books and articles.

Fr. McNabb's *The Church and the Land* is not a book for the Catholic who is eager to compromise with the modern world. Rather, it is an uncompromising presentation of social principles rooted in the Gospel, in Catholic philosophy, in St. Thomas, and in the papal social encyclicals, especially Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum* (1891). Like his master St. Thomas, Fr. McNabb did not shrink from carrying an argument to its logical conclusion. For one who is serious about learning and living Catholic social principles, Fr. McNabb is tonic and strong drink.

The Church and the Land, a collection of short essays, begins by taking seriously the teaching of Pope Leo that "The law should favour ownership and its policy should be to induce as many as possible to become owners," as well as other passages from the same encyclical about the good results that will come from workers owning the land they farm, and goes on to consider appropriate means for achieving this.

Fr. McNabb was an upholder of Distributism, which is generally associated with Chesterton and Belloc, friends of his. Distributism, which might better be called the system of micro-property, is an arrangement for fulfilling the oft-expressed papal desire for a wider and more just distribution of property. In the course of argu-

ing for this, Fr. McNabb points out the absurdity of many of our modern economic notions, for example, our frequent confusion of *real wealth* (land, food and drink, houses, barns, tools, clothes) with what he calls *token wealth* (such as money and stock certificates).

Though Fr. McNabb and other Distributists do not call for the elimination of all forms of token wealth, they stress that by confusing the two, modern man falls into grave intellectual error. Looking at our own present situation, the hourly rise and fall of the stock market neither adds to nor subtracts from the real wealth of our country, but many see it a cause of our national economic health. But when men and nations become more concerned with real things rather than tokens, they will take steps to subordinate their financial markets to serve the provision of real goods, rather than subject the production of real wealth to the power of those who spend their days trading in tokens.

Fr. McNabb notes that during the hyper-inflation in Germany in the early 1920s, when the value of the German mark had fallen to fantastically low levels, farmers would not sell their potatoes for marks; rather, they would barter for other real goods. Of course, barter is not a sensible way to run an economy in normal times, but this example strikingly illustrates how real men need real wealth, and that whenever tokens get in the way of production and necessary exchange, it is a sign that the management of token wealth has gone askew and must be changed.

Another theme that runs

through this book is contraception, or rather the link between town life with its token-dominated economy and contraception. Fr. McNabb was a deter-

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mined foe of Margaret Sanger and the contraceptive movement which was just rearing its ugly head in the 1920s. He saw, however, that the workingman's circumstances of life, deprived of a decent wage and sufficient housing, were in fact a near occasion of sin. "A young [Catholic] clerk in the city has just married. After a good deal of search he has found a small flat of three rooms.... His landlord...gives a polite but unmistakable hint that 'if there is an addition to the family' their agreement will be at an end." Years later he is "the father

of five children. He finds himself almost forty and out of work through the failure of his firm. His slender savings are rapidly lessening.... His friends, who are mostly non-Catholic, tell him he is reckless in having a family. He begins to ask himself if in conscience he can bring into existence another being whom he can provide for only by neglecting those whom he has already brought into existence."

Fr. McNabb's remedy for this was to urge Catholics to return to the land. He pointed out that not only would the Catholic popula-

tion grow greater with rural families, but that much of England's farmland had been abandoned, and as a result the country had to import food from abroad. In the cities, the unemployed; in the country, empty land; throughout the nation, a need for food. Could these facts be the beginning of some economic wisdom?

Of course not all that Fr. McNabb writes is eternal wisdom. Some applies strictly to the unique circumstances of his time. But that money is not real wealth, that modern life encourages, almost demands small families — this is eternal Catholic wisdom.

IHS Press has undertaken to reprint many of the classics of modern Catholic social teaching. They have already given us new editions of works by Chesterton and Belloc, many of which were out of print, and their efforts to provide American readers with these foundational works cannot be praised too highly.

Thomas Storck

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