



Cardinal Newman's Ideal of the Gentleman

By Mitchell Kalpakgian

In his classic *The Idea of a University* Cardinal Newman explains how one of the fruits of a liberal arts education is refinement. Man's intellectual nature acts upon his moral nature, and this influence cultivates manners which assume the form of virtues such as "veracity, probity, equity, fairness, gentleness, benevolence, and amiableness"—all qualities that elevate human life and create a civilized society. This cultivated, refined mind acquires a natural taste for the noble, the beautiful, and the ideal—what Newman calls "a fastidiousness, analogous to the delicacy or daintiness which good nurture or a sickly habit induces in respect of food". This refined taste or appreciation for high standards develops a fastidiousness about the distinction between proper and improper, civilized and barbaric, and excellent and mediocre—a sense of discrimination that forms "an absolute loathing of certain offences, or a detestation and scorn of them as ungentlemanlike". Thus a good education fosters a sense of dignity or propriety that refuses to lower itself to crude manners, coarse language, or small-minded meanness. A refined mind possesses what Newman calls "a safeguard" or sense of shame that inhibits vulgarity or boorishness unworthy of a gentleman or lady:

Then, again, the fastidiousness I am speaking of will create a simple hatred of that miserable tone of conversation... : moreover, it will create an irresolution and indecision in doing wrong, which will act as a *remora* [delay] till the danger is past away.

This scrupulosity even manifests itself in

the gentleman's great sorrow and humiliation for violations of civility—"so keen a remorse, and so intense a self-hatred, as are even sufficient to cure the moral disorder, and to prevent its accesses ever afterwards." In short, a liberal arts education produces "an intellectual culture" that refines the mind, sensitizes the conscience, and educates the taste in recognizing the noble and the base.

What are bad manners? When humans do not control their appetites, passions, speech, or moods, the animal or lower part of human nature prevails, and selfishness and pride rule. The body governs the soul.

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To combat this "fearful subjection to sense", "the inducements of sensual gratification", and "the besotting power of sensuality", Newman explains, man needs a natural remedy, some "homeopathic medicine" to resist the temptations of egotism. This aid to good manners and civility is the refined mind, a power which "intellectual cultivation furnishes to us in rescuing the victims of passion and self-will". Mental cul-

tivation substitutes rational pleasures for carnal appetites, introduces higher pursuits than the indulgences of self-gratification: "It expels the excitements of sense by its introduction of those of the intellect." Intellectual refinement, then, strengthens a person to withstand the wiles of the devil and "will obstruct and stave off the approach of our spiritual enemy" because a true liberal arts education "will occupy the mind with objects naturally noble and innocent". In short, mental cultivation counteracts the tendency of bad manners to behave without restraint, thoughtfulness, tact, and graciousness: "it is the drawing of the mind off from things which will harm it to subjects which are worthy of a rational being."

Newman identifies the special marks of a gentleman. First, "he is one who never inflicts pain", a person who measures his words to avoid "whatever may cause a jar or jolt in the minds of those with whom he is cast". Acting always with the utmost tact and respect for the feelings of others and thinking of pleasing others in every matter, the gentleman seeks to create a hospitable atmosphere: "his great concern being to make every one at their ease and at home." He takes a personal interest in everyone, seeks to be acquainted with all persons, and does not ignore anyone: "he is tender toward the bashful, gentle toward the distant, and merciful to the absurd." At the same time he is not officious or intrusive as he lets the social flow of the occasion assume its own spontaneous direction: "He is mainly occupied merely in removing the obstacles which hinder the free and unembarrassed action of those about him." The

gentleman possesses the art of conversation, the knowledge of when to speak and when to be silent, the ability to introduce general topics of conversation and to avoid personal matters and unpleasant subjects. He never dominates the conversation, resorts to gossip, or speaks incessantly about himself: "he guards against unseasonable allusions, or topics which may irritate; he is seldom prominent in conversation, and never wearisome." The civility of a gentleman shuns aloofness, gloom, resentment, or arrogance in his relationships. He remains always the magnanimous man who "interprets everything for the best" and seeks to make friends even of his enemies, observing the proverb that "we should ever conduct ourselves towards our enemy as if he were one day to be our friend". In the company of discourteous or unpleasant people he always maintains his composure. Always patient and forbearing, "He has too much good sense to be affronted at insults, he is too well employed to be worried to remember injuries, and too indolent to bear malice." In a word, the gentleman puts others first and places himself last; he honors persons with courtesy and charity and subordinates his own preferences, pleasures, opinions, and convenience for the sake of the happiness of others.

When engaged in arguments with oppo-

nents in controversies, he conducts himself with the same magnanimity that governs his actions in pleasant company in social occasions: "Nowhere shall we find greater candour, consideration, indulgence." His speech avoids acrimony, petulance, and immoderation, and in the course of a dispute or disagreement he never loses his poise and self-control in a fit of anger. Even though a gentleman may lack Christian belief, he respects the Catholic faith and honors "institutions as venerable, beautiful, or useful, to which he does not assent". Again his intellectual refinement, which acknowledges "ideas of the sublime, majestic, and beautiful", forbids him to mock the mysteries of faith or to hold a bias toward religious ideals. Even in heated discussions about religion or politics, everything about the gentleman reflects large-mindedness and evinces sensitivity for the moral sensibilities of others, "the gentleness and effeminacy of feeling, which is the attendant on civilization". A liberally educated gentleman brooks no pettiness, narrow-mindedness, vindictiveness, or meanness, for his sense of good taste or fastidiousness "becomes the enemy of extravagances of any kind" and "shrinks from what are called scenes".

Thus an education that cultivates a refined intelligence by its very nature also develops good taste, noble ideals, civilized

conduct, and an appreciation for the good, the true, and the beautiful. It instills a sense of self-respect, the art of pleasing others, a charitable heart, the principle of honor, and the capacity for discrimination. Intellectual culture, then, in Newman's eyes, not only shapes manners and social virtues but also disposes a person for Christian culture and fits the mind for the contemplation of the Catholic faith because it elevates the mind, heart, and conscience to the highest standards.

The ideals of a gentleman dispose a person to embrace the eternal realities that St. Paul teaches to the Gentiles: "whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely."

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