Newman's Theorem

1.   J. H. Newman, The Idea of a University

  Fergal McGrath, The Consecration of Learning, Lectures on
Newman's "Idea of a University,"   Dublin, Gill & Son, 1962

2.   Newman's theorem is the major premiss in Newman's argument. The
theorem is:
  ~~Ignorance of a part~~
  omission of a part of knowledge involves
a) ignorance of that part
b) mutilation of the whole
c) distortion of the remainder.

  Newman uses the theorem in the argument which adds the minor
premiss: theology is a part of knowledge.
  Fr. McGrath would say that the theorem is universally valid.

  Our concern will be
a) not to prove the theorem but to illustrate it
b) to indicate the possibility of extending it
c) to point out its negative character (mutilation, distortion)

3.   Is knowledge a whole that can be mutilated?
  Is it like a quart of milk or like an organism?

a)   Piaget's theory of learning
  The element in learning is "adaptation," which involves the
two elements of
  assimilation: the use of what one already can do, already under-
stands, already knows
  adjustment: the added modification to fit the present case

  Adaptation differentiates rudimentary operations; adaptations
yield a series of differentiated operations; differentiated operations
are combined; combinations are explored to form groups; groups are
fused into higher groups

  To know is to have learned; and learning yields a structured
whole; therefore, knowledge is a structured whole.

b)   The disproportion between experience and knowledge.
  Knowledge ranges over the universe; but knowledge has to have
a basis in experience, else it is not distinguished from mere imagining,
guessing, theorizing; and our experience is limited to an extremenly
limited time-volumen of data
  Knowledge to be based on experience has to be organized and
structured out from a narrow basis.

c)   The nature of judgement.
     When one makes a mistake, one says: "I never thought of that."
     Judgement supposes that one takes into account everything
that is relevant to the propespective judgement.
     Hence, one is in a position to judge on an issue, only in so far
as one knows all that is relevant to the issue.
     Further, one is in position to judge that one is not ready to
propounce, only in the measure that one knows what is or might be
relevant and yet one does not know about that.
     Judging presupposes wisdom that orders all things, that involves
at least a scheme of of the unĝverse (age of reason; minor).

     But one does not know about **X**, if one cannot make judgements
about **X**; and one can make the judgements only in virtue of a universal
scheme that orders all; hence, knowledge has to be an organized,
structured whole.

d)   The hermeneutic circle.
     One can understand the whole only by understanding t e parts, and
one can understand the parts only by understanding the whole.
     Words, sentence, paragraph, chapter, book, books by the same
author, cultural milieu, history of that milieu, relation of that
history to my milieu.

     The hermeneutic circle reveals the orgainzed nature of knowledge.

4,   Does omission of a part result in distortion?   Horizon

     To omit is a part does not mean that its place remains vacant;
it means that other disciplines move in to fill up the vacuum,
that other disciplines start giving the xx answers to questions that
do not fall within their competence.

     Omit theology: the questions that regard religion are taken over by
psychologists, psychoxtherapists, sociologists, philosophers
anthropologists, historians of culture, historians of religion
literature (Lanson, Romantisme), art, periodicals, the press

     Omit philosophy: foundations of mathematics, foundations of
physics, philosophy of science, of history, of life, of art, of
language, of art, of law, of the state, of religion, of education
     All are worked out not by philosophers but by specialists

     Omit theology and philosophy, and then choose between literary
and scientific studies.

     C. P. Snow, The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution,
The Rede Lecture 1959, Cambridge Univ. Press 1959.
     F. R. Leavis, Two Cultures? New York, Pantheon [America 4 V 63 p632]

5.   Extension of Newman's theorem. The disintegration of community.

Community presupposes a "common sense," a field of common meaning.

If different groups within a community omit different parts of knowledge, then there arise opposed collective delusions:
different groups will have different blind spots (ignorance of a part)
they will have differently mutilated wholes
they will have differently distorted remainders

Hence, they will approach the same common problems differently, with different ends in view, with different acceptable procedures or rememdies, to propose different or opposed solutions

Problems keep recurring, and the differences will generate mutual incomprehension, mutual suspicion, mutual hostility.
There will develop opposed defensive and then offensive organs, strategies, tactics

If one group gains the upperhand, then the others become under-privileged, depressed, backward; they are due either to rexbel or to be liquidated.

6.   Perhaps mm enough has been said to illustrate the meaning and significance of Newman's theorem.

It remains that the theorem itself is couched in negative terms.
It does not say what a whole is but stress the fact that a whole can be mutilated.
It does not say how different parts positively reinforce and complement one another, but it stresses the fact that omission of a part involves a distortion of the remainder.

It would seem that we must go on to the positive aspect of the matter.