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The 'making Of Men'

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BOOK REVIEW

The 'making of men': the idea and reality of Newman's university in Oxford and Dublin, by Paul Shrimpton, Leominster, Gracewing, 2014, 587 pp., £25.00 (paperback), ISBN 978-0852448243

To most historians of education, both Newman and 'the idea' in the title of this book are clear indications of what lies ahead: a look at Cardinal John Henry Newman and his life as a ground-breaking and storied leader in higher education in the nineteenth century. Newman's essay on *The idea of a university* is still considered by many to be the quintessential statement of what a modern (read: the 1800s and later) university should look like and be about even today. It is classical thinking about the value, benefit and nature of a university education.

To this end, Paul Shrimpton offers us a large and long treatment of Newman's life, from his early childhood to his Oxford education and, finally, to his valiant effort to establish a new institution, the Catholic University, in Dublin, Ireland. It is a vast and intricate study with a great deal of detail and fascinating discussion of the many challenges that faced Newman as he tried, to the very best of his abilities, to start a new university in Dublin. The challenges that confronted Newman proved, over time, to be insurmountable and he eventually conceded to the futility of his efforts and returned to England after several years of effort in Ireland.

With ready access to archival records of Newman's own writings and diaries as well as the letters and correspondence of many of Newman's detractors, most notably Paul Cullen, the Archbishop who served as Newman's superior, Paul Shrimpton provides a previously untapped source of insight and reinterpretation of Newman's struggles. Shrimpton concludes, after some 400 and more pages, that, in fact, it was Cullen, among others, who publicly supported Newman, but privately sowed many seeds of doubt and misrepresented many of Newman's innovations to the Vatican in Rome. In short order, Shrimpton claims, Cullen undermined much of the organisational and spiritual support that Newman may have thought he could count on. In the last chapters of the book, knowingly titled, 'The university: change and decay' followed by 'Newman's legacy', the failures of Newman, despite his inspired leadership and commitment, are chronicled and laid bare. There is much more than the lack of support from Cullen that undercut Newman, including his desperate work to change the culture of the Irish people who valued education and a Catholic institution but in the face of the Great Famine, and the fact that another university, Trinity, was relatively close by, failed to send their sons to the new Catholic University in numbers sufficient to keep it afloat.

Shrimpton compares life at Oxford, clearly the ideal that Newman had in mind, to what was created at Catholic University. The differences that are described show the great gaps in what the English valued and saw embodied in Oxford and Cambridge, and draw a stark comparison with what the Irish saw (or did not see) of value in yet another institution of higher learning. One is quickly reminded of Abraham Maslow's 'hierarchy of needs' in which the pyramid of needs begins at the bottom with the basics like water, food and shelter, and later, much higher on the pyramid, we begin to see the need for education. In Ireland, outside of Dublin, many families were struggling to find steady supplies of food and shelter. The lofty aspirations of a new university paled by comparison in the face of desperate times for the common man. While the new Catholic University quickly added a medical school, theology, and more to an existing liberal arts education, it was too far a reach for the average Irish family to support, even for a favourite son who might have been a good scholar and deserved a college degree. Newman

clearly saw that re-creating Oxford was not a realistic goal and aimed much lower but, even so, he could not reconcile the need for the basics of life with the lofty expectations of a college degree.

~~With his ready access to~~ Oxford archives, Shrimpton takes us on a sometimes convoluted route in and out, around, and through a multitude of resources and previously closeted information. We learn a great deal about Newman and his early college career, his aspirations, his tutors, his positions at Oxford and his personal and professional advancement. We learn that he began as an Anglican but converted to Catholicism and carried with him, to some extent, the rare air of the convert. He believed deeply and strongly in his convictions and was steadfast in his efforts to bring 'new light' to young men under his charge both at Oxford and later at the Catholic University. Newman believed in allowing mistakes and errors to be committed by his students with the assurance of forgiveness. In fact, it was this perceived lack of discipline that was used to undermine Newman by his detractors (e.g. Cullen) and, over time, to sow the seeds of his failure as the rector at Catholic University.

Generous to a fault, Newman saw mistakes in judgement as another means of educating young men, especially outside the classroom. In fact, Newman was prescient in anticipating the theories and beliefs that emerged in the mid-twentieth century among psychologists and others, such as deans of student life who began to lobby hard for educating the 'whole student'. By use of this terminology, these new theorists argued that students in college were learning as much, if not more, outside the classroom as they were in. Newman grasped this concept long before his time but it created a new layer of friction between Newman and his superiors and some of his peers. At Oxford, such transgressions and errors in judgement were tolerated by the tutors and authorities. But unfortunately for Newman, such behaviour was seen as too 'liberal' and too great a challenge to those in authority in Dublin.

The 'making of men' is a significant accomplishment. It provides both a strong intellectual history, delving deeply beneath the rhetoric and into the beliefs of a significant nineteenth-century cleric and educator, John Henry Newman. There is also a subtle institutional history that lies beneath the stories of Oxford and the emergent Catholic University in the mid-nineteenth century. As noted earlier, Paul Shrimpton has made good use of his ~~ready access to a~~ ~~vivid~~ historical trove of archival data in Dublin as well as in Oxford, including private papers of Newman, Cullen and others.

If there is a downside, it is in the assumptions made in constructing the book. If there were ~~instrumental~~ events in his early life, we do not learn of them here. We skip over Newman's childhood and find him enrolled at Oxford in a few, quick pages. Likewise, in the final chapters, Shrimpton trusts his own interpretations to gauge what Newman's thoughts might have been. For example, he speculates with regard to coeducation (Newman would have been supportive of women's education, but against coeducation in residence halls). Other projections seem a bit 'beyond the pale', but after such diligent and careful research we can forgive the author these stretches of credibility. The book is a very good read for those interested in Cardinal Newman and his challenges as a man before his time. At 587 pages, *The 'making of men'* is not for the faint-hearted but it reads well and provides a new perspective on the challenges of innovation and change in nineteenth-century England and a sympathetic and insightful biography of Newman and his *Idea of the university* not found elsewhere.

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