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A Response to Eamon Duffy

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At the close of his epistolary protest at Ian Ker's contemptuous review of *John Henry Newman* in the *Times Literary Supplement* in 2002, Frank Turner remarked: 'Ker's review raises the larger issue of whether modern British and European religious history will continue as an arena for professional research and critical analysis or succumb to the parochial constraints and contentions of denominational and intra-denominational discourse. Ian Ker has made his choice in the matter, and I have made mine.'[1] My article in this JOURNAL in October 2010, 'History *versus* hagiography: the reception of Turner's *Newman*', sought to demonstrate that professional research and critical analysis were altogether suffocated by the contentions of denominational discourse after that book's publication in 2002. The article was careful not in any simple way to legitimise Turner's conclusions – indeed, it set out schematically and at length the interpretative retorts which they invited – but rather his purpose and method. I concluded:

> What is at stake . . . in the fuss over Turner's *Newman*, is not the plausibility or otherwise of his interpretation. It far transcends that. What is at stake is the legitimacy and remit of historical inquiry itself, when confronted with a vocal interest group whose principles and prejudices are seldom acknowledged. The difference between the book and the great majority of its critics, therefore, is not between Catholicism and Protestantism, nor even religion and secularism, but between history itself and hagiography – a difference not of prejudice, but of methodology.[2]

A great – though mortal – man once wrote, in the *Tracts for the Times, no. 1*, '*Choose* your side'.[3] In his response to my article on 'History *versus*

[1] Frank M. Turner, 'Letters to the editor', *TLS*, 20 Dec. 2002, 15.
[2] Simon Skinner, 'History *versus* hagiography: the reception of Turner's *Newman*', this JOURNAL lxi (2010), 781.
[3] [J. H. Newman], *Tracts for the Times, no. 1*, Oxford 1833, 4 (original emphasis).

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hagiography', it is at once enlightening and dispiriting to see Eamon Duffy choosing his.

In reply, I will address the seven substantive accusations which I extrapolate from it: (1) that I seem to think Newman studies should be confined to professional historians; (2) that I may have my own confessional axe to grind; (3) that I am discourteous; (4) that I nourish conspiracy theories around the proscription of uncongenial scholarship; (5) that Turner was culpable of 'cod-psychology'; and (6) more broadly that Turner was wrong; and (7) that Turner sought to belittle Newman's historical importance.

(1) Duffy's response opens with the broad charge that I dismiss Turner's critics as 'amateurs' who '"literally could not comprehend" what Turner was up to', and seek 'restriction of the right to an opinion on Turner's book to the guild of professional historians'.[4] Of course, my article argued not that (professional) historians should monopolise Newman studies, but that (Catholic) theologians and priests should not; that reviews of Turner's *Newman* were overwhelmingly entrusted to the (Catholic) theologians and priests who populate Newman studies; and that those few reviews commissioned from professional historians were markedly different in their tone and judgement on the book. If I disapproved of anyone other than tenured academic historians pronouncing on these matters, I would hardly have (often approvingly) quoted such diverse commentators as the novelists, journalists and writers A. N. Wilson, Daniel Johnson, Digby Anderson and Tristram Hunt.[5] But of course an historian would make special claims for his or her vocational capacity to interpret a work of history, by an historian; and is disposed and trained to understand an analysis of Newman which seeks to situate him laterally, rather than in terms of his theological or spiritual legacy, or his claims on the posthumous honours system of his chosen communion. In that respect, Duffy's accompanying comment that 'The ordinary rules of historical evidence are intelligible to anybody'[6] is more than simply professionally dispiriting; the suggestion that historical data is simply out there, and that academic training yields no additional advantages in its acquisition, and years of contextual reading no additional insights in its interpretation, is arguably the most jaw-dropping element of his entire reply. Professor Duffy has, presumably, supervised a large number of doctoral theses. Given these views, why did he bother? Or, when prospective postgraduate students write to him, does he reply conscientiously advising that 'the ordinary rules of historical evidence are intelligible to anybody'[7] and that they would be

[4] Skinner, 'The reception of Turner's *Newman*', 781, 776; Eamon Duffy, 'The reception of Turner's *Newman*: a reply to Simon Skinner', 534.
[5] Skinner, 'The reception of Turner's *Newman*', 766.
[6] Duffy, 'A reply', 534.
[7] Ibid. 534.

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wasting their time? Is it really the case that, if shown the charred recantations of a Marian Protestant, or the encrypted invoice for an Elizabethan priest-hole, my understanding and explication of them would be perfectly equal to Professor Duffy's? If so I might give it a go, for nineteenth-century religious history certainly has its partisan frustrations.

(2) One point of Duffy's response provoked me beyond dismay to concern, and that is his remark that 'In his assault on the alleged religious bias of Turner's reviewers, Dr Skinner is careful to insist that he himself has no confessional axe to grind.'[8] There is no citation for this, nor could there be, since nowhere in the article did I assert that I had no confessional axe to grind, and for the obvious reason that that was its entire premise: an academic protest against confessional axe-grinding. I came to the study of Tractarianism and by extension Newman as someone interested in the political and intellectual history of early nineteenth-century Britain, but increasingly persuaded of the anachronism of a historiography which failed to accommodate its manifold religious dimensions; interested especially in the reactionary political culture of the age of reform, I alighted on the social and political commentary of the Oxford Movement as a neglected species of its paternalist thought. No previous commentator on my work – a demographic which includes some of those whose criticism of Turner was instanced in my article – has ever discerned any hint of confessionalism in it.[9] Duffy's is therefore a troubling remark, and unsurprisingly it is not elaborated; I would ingenuously like – and readers deserve – to know from what materials my 'confessional axe' is hewn. But this is manifestly the reception which cultural, or intellectual or political historians who dare to touch on Newman can expect. As my article observed, Catholic reviewers overwhelmingly supposed that Turner's own book 'was premised on an antecedent sectarian hostility to Newman' because they could not otherwise account for any deviation from a prolonged genuflection to its subject.[10]

Since Duffy raises this, a reciprocal question is whether he comes to the field unencumbered by predispositions of any sort. Certainly I was momentarily perplexed that an historian of the early modern period should migrate several centuries to pitch into a debate about Victorian and later historiography. It is hard not to conclude that the essential explanation for this is that Duffy is a self-described 'cradle

[8] Ibid. 534.

[9] See, for particular examples of approbatory reviews by commentators with religious sensibilities, or in religious journals, or both: Sheridan Gilley, *Church Times,* 8 July 2005, 25; Nigel Yates, this JOURNAL lvi (2005), 792–3; Jeremy Morris, *HJ* lii (2009), 533–4; Denis Paz, *Reviews in Religion and Theology* xii (Sept. 2005), 501; John Marsden, *Heythrop Journal* xlvii (Oct. 2006), 651; and Nigel Aston, *New Directions* (Mar. 2005), http://trushare.com/0118MAR05/MR05BOOK.htm.

[10] Skinner, 'The reception of Turner's *Newman*', 776.

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Catholic',[11] and therefore a member of the order to whom all historical judgments pertaining to Newman are ultimately reserved. By this all too familiar reckoning, all non-Catholic scholars of Newman's life or thought are doomed to be the losers in a game of confessional trumps: Turner, not apparently a Catholic, was one of our leading historians of nineteenth-century Britain, but his Catholic critics could veto his understanding of Newman, not because they knew more about the nineteenth-century, or Britain, or Newman, but because they were Catholics. Of course Newman converted to Rome – what spiritual colossus wouldn't? 'It was' as Ian Ker has put it, dismissing Turner's suggestion that this was 'an open historical question', 'simply a question of time'.[12] Yet as a very distinguished religious historian, and Irish Catholic by background, once put it when in reflective mood, 'There is something fundamentally dishonest in a Catholic of my background and generation pretending to offer a detached, universally applicable account of the power or attraction of the Church.'[13] Recovering the power and attraction of the (Catholic) Church, it follows, especially to someone initially remote from its communion, requires imaginative biographical insight and rigorous historical contextualisation. Newman's conversion should not, therefore, be reduced to congenial teleologies, but explicated in terms of 'analysable historical contingencies'.[14]

Of course it might be held that Duffy came to this field as a very distinguished historian of Roman Catholicism, whose own Roman Catholicism was incidental, and who was therefore disinterested in the matter of Newman himself. Certainly – and as my mailbox in the aftermath of the article demonstrated – it does not follow that being Roman Catholic predisposes anyone to Newman personally. But like virtually all of Turner's critics Duffy had something to say specifically on the matter of Newman's beatification in 2010. He celebrated it in *The Guardian* as an affirmation of 'Newman's lifelong struggle to combine intellectual integrity with the surrender of heart and mind to a God he experienced both as love and truth', and therefore, given the Catholic Church's current travails, as 'a candle in the dark'.[15] He also wrote an article in the *Irish Times* which celebrated Newman's legacy in theological counterpoint to the dogmatism

[11] Eamon Duffy, 'Confessions of a cradle Catholic', a beautifully written and evocative memoir, in his *Faith of our fathers: reflections on Catholic tradition*, London 2004, 11–19.

[12] Ian Ker, review of John Henry Newman, *Apologia pro vita sua and six sermons*, ed. Frank M. Turner, New Haven–London 2008, *Catholic Historical Review* xcv (Apr. 2009), 407.

[13] Duffy, *Faith of our fathers*, 11.

[14] Turner, 'Letters to the editor', 15.

[15] Eamon Duffy, 'Newman offers church a candle in the dark', *Guardian* (main section), 18 Sept. 2010, 33.

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of Pope Benedict XVI,[16] and reflected on Newman at length in the *New York Review of Books* as 'A hero of the Church'.[17] My article insisted that 'a historiography which seeks to render Newman human ultimately has no points of intersection' with a sympathetic tradition preoccupied with his representative status as an exemplar, hero or candle in the dark.[18]

(3) Duffy imputes to me a *de haut en bas* tone (before ending his article with an admonition in Latin). It is true that scholars look down on much of what passes for Newman studies. And the characterisation of the tone of my article as 'excitable and often discourteous'[19] is probably unexceptionable. On the matter of history *versus* hagiography, I am certainly excitable. Not to be would constitute a violation of the professional historian's hippocratic oath. Discourtesy, however, is in the eye of the beholder: Duffy's own commentary on contemporary church matters has been variously criticised for being 'questionable and tendentious',[20] 'caricature', 'snide and mocking', 'disgraceful'[21] and 'offensive'.[22] You can't make an omelette without breaking eggs, eh? And while I certainly sought to be at least as aggressive in defence of Turner's scholarship as were its most aggressive detractors, I am satisfied that I did not equal their discourtesy. Ian Ker denounced the book even before it had appeared as 'old hat', and when informed of a commendatory quotation from an academic who had read it in proof (the hugely distinguished Victorianist George Landow), replied 'Yes, well, he's a fool'.[23] Turner's other reviewers, we should perhaps be reminded, variously spoke of the book as 'overweight', 'silly' and a 'Protestant polemic',[24] a 'colossal mischief' and 'an act of libel',[25] 'an immense muddle', 'ridiculous', 'nonsense', 'tabloid-quality scholarship',[26] 'bloated' and 'odious';[27] they dismissed 'poor Professor Turner'[28] as

[16] Idem, '"Man of sacristy" walks in shadow of John Paul II', *Irish Times*. 8 Sept. 2010, http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/opinion/2010/0908/1224278447741.html.

[17] Idem, 'A hero of the Church', *New York Review of Books,* 12 Dec. 2010, http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2010/dec/23/hero-church/?page=1.

[18] Skinner, 'The reception of Turner's *Newman*', 779.

[19] Duffy, 'A reply', 534.

[20] Stuart Chessman, 'Newman, Wojtyla and Ratzinger: the thoughts of Eamon Duffy', 15 Sept. 2010, http://sthughofcluny.org/2010/09/newman-wojtyla-and-ratzinger-the-thoughts-of-eamon-duffy.html.

[21] Nick Donnelly, 'Catholic theologian Eamon Duffy mocks Pope Benedict & uses Newman to attack him', 9 Sept. 2010, http://protectthepope.com/?p=1092.

[22] William Doino, 'The real John Henry Newman', 20 Sept. 2010, http://www.firstthings.com/blogs/firstthoughts/2010/09/20/the-real-john-henry-newman. All these comments were in response to Duffy's '"Man of sacristy"'.

[23] Sholto Byrnes, 'Diary', *Independent on Sunday* (main section), 23 June 2002, 23.

[24] Ian Ker, 'Slow road to Rome', *TLS*, 6 Dec. 2002, 32.

[25] Stanley L. Jaki, 'Newman, an "apostate"?', *New Oxford Review* lxx (May 2003), 38.

[26] Edward T. Oakes, 'Newman's liberal problem', *First Things* iv (2003), 46–7.

[27] Lawrence S. Cunningham, book review, *Horizons* (Spring 2003), 144–5.

[28] Digby Anderson, 'An intolerant sort of liberal', *Spectator*, 26 Oct. 2002, 53–4.

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'an amateur',[29] a 'self-serving controversialist', a 'weasel'[30] and, darkest of all in the Jesuit lexicon, 'scrupulously liberal'.[31] One ingenuously claimed that this peerlessly close-grained and textually rooted biographical reappraisal of the Anglican Newman, by one of the world's pre-eminent intellectual historians, was written in the ideological service of a secularising 'war machine' devoted to sustaining public interest in 'the issue of some minors having been sexually abused by some Catholic priests' while it 'hands these minors over to homosexual couples for adoption'.[32] Duffy's concern for the proprieties of academic debate might have carried greater force had it been extended to the frothing idiocy of such responses.

(4) Duffy thinks me 'dangerously close to conspiracy theory' in arguing that such emanations from Newman studies as *The Cambridge companion to John Henry Newman*, of 2009, effectively embargoed Turner's scholarship – for example in citing Martin Svaglic's 1967 edition of the *Apologia* rather than Turner's Yale critical edition of 2008 – insisting that the latter 'had not yet been published when the *Cambridge companion* went to press'.[33] Even accepting that publishing lead-times are sufficient to explain contributors' failure to reference Turner's *Apologia*, they do not explain contributors' failure to reference even once Turner's major biography of 2002. Or had they all, with enviable punctiliousness, submitted their copy seven years before the *Companion*'s publication? Of all the points which my article sought to make, I do regard this as just about the most serious, and I welcome the opportunity to restate it: it is scandalous that major university presses have entrusted the task of Newman companions to a self-referential coterie which imposes a prohibition on uncongenial scholarship. It would not be unreasonable for such a companion to allude, for example as Peter Nockles did in his review in *Albion*, to 'the massive scholarship based on comprehensive and detailed research of an exhaustive range of manuscript and printed sources, the fertility of ideas and argument, the provocative interpretation of evidence which characterize Frank Turner's monumental new study', while adding that many in the field found his conclusions controversial or unpersuasive.[34] It is totally inexcusable not to mention it once. Perhaps in years to come Turner's *Newman* will be a forbidden text, like Aristotle's book on comedy in Umberto Eco's *The name of the rose*, and intellectually adventurous seminarians will breath their last, gasping at its originality and suggestiveness, their forefingers and tongues blackened by its deliberately poisoned pages.

[29] Cunningham review, 145.
[30] Jaki, 'Newman, an "apostate"?', 42, 44.
[31] Oakes, 'Newman's liberal problem', 49.
[32] Jaki, 'Newman, an "apostate"?', 45.
[33] Duffy, 'A reply', 535; Skinner, 'The reception of Turner's *Newman*', 778–9.
[34] Peter B. Nockles, book review, *Albion* xxxv (Winter 2004), 669–73.

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Since my article appeared, Colin Barr, the author of a notably original and well-reviewed study of *Paul Cullen, John Henry Newman, and the Catholic University of Ireland, 1845–1865* (2003), has reviewed the *Cambridge companion* in the *Irish Theological Quarterly* in terms which its publisher, editors and contributors – since preferring to discountenance my reflections – would do well to digest. Barr – an historian – judged the *Companion* 'an embarrassing (to its publisher) failure', not simply because it was a 'theologians' Newman, innocent of all but the most basic historical contextualization' but, more seriously, because it was 'a work of partisan scholarship masquerading as a reference intended for "new readers and non-specialists", precisely those who are least equipped to notice its assumptions, silences, and elisions'. Barr in particular noted the *Companion*'s 'extraordinary, one must say programmatic, refusal to acknowledge the existence of the late Frank Turner', whose 'books are without question among the most important to have been written about Newman in the last quarter-century'. 'It would be one thing', he rightly commented, 'for the contributors to take issue with some or all of Turner's conclusions, but simply universally to ignore them is absurd, and inexcusable . . . Nor is it only Turner who is ignored: there is precious little reference in any of the essays to recent historical writing, and indeed little to any scholarship from without the magic circle.' 'In the end', Barr concluded, 'this is less the *Cambridge Companion to John Henry Newman*, but rather the Catholic Companion to the Blessed John Henry Newman. This is not in itself an unworthy thing, but it is not what was advertised, and not what a major university press should produce.'[35] Amen to that.

Duffy writes: 'This "prohibition", [Skinner] thinks, "was not accidental", and he sees in it a sectarian attempt to sideline Turner's scholarship'.[36] Let me underline that I categorically do see this as a deliberate and sectarian prohibition of Turner's (and other) scholarship. As I pointed out, of 'the thirteen contributors, not one was in a university history department; ten were Catholic priests (half of them Jesuits), including a cardinal and a monsignor'. The editor was Ian Ker. In his indignant response to Turner's letter of remonstrance to the *TLS* in 2003, with which this article began, Ian Ker defended his scholarly 'integrity' by insisting that he had 'never written specifically about Newman's sanctity'.[37] In the same year as the *Companion* appeared, Oxford University Press reissued Ker's 1988 biography in order to capitalise on the publicity surrounding Newman's beatification. In the 'Afterword' to the 2009 edition Ker wrote the following which, given his protestations that he has never contended for Newman's sainthood, bears close reading:

[35] Colin Barr, *Irish Theological Quarterly* lxxvi (May 2011), 192–3.
[36] Duffy, 'A reply', 535.
[37] Ian Ker, 'Letters to the editor', *TLS*, 3 Jan. 2003, 15.

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In the Preface to this biography, first published in 1988, I wrote that 'my reading and re-reading of his writings over the years has only deepened my conviction that John Henry Newman is to be numbered among the Doctors of the Church'. *When I wrote those words, I was well aware that the Roman Catholic Church would not declare Newman to be a Doctor of the Church unless he had first been canonized as a saint.* My words began to come true when, three years later in 1991, Pope John Paul II declared Newman to be 'Venerable' or a figure to be venerated for the 'heroic virtues' that he displayed in his life.[38]

By what possible casuistry can that claim, front and central in the preface to Ker's major biography of 1988, be taken to mean anything other than: 'Newman is or should be a saint'? This 2009 passage preceded Ker's claim to have been instrumental in the miracle required to qualify Newman for beatification. Ker continues to insist that he has never contended for Newman's beatification. He should therefore be advised that someone posing as him told the *Telegraph* in April 2009 that 'Newman was definitely a saint and he was a very English saint. He had a great sense of humour like St Thomas More . . . As soon as he is canonised he will definitely be made a theological "doctor of the Church" and he will be seen as a doctor of this period we are living in.'[39] The issue is simple. You cannot simultaneously claim to the world's Catholics that you are a major proponent and prophet (and facilitator) of Newman's sanctity, and to the world's scholars that you are a critical *compère* to his academic study.

Duffy circumnavigates these extraordinarily serious observations in preference for a relatively marginal quarrel over which edition of Newman's *Apologia* might be thought definitive. But it might be added even in that regard that I am not alone among historians in regarding Turner's *Apologia* as 'the standard scholarly edition': that was the verdict of the review in this JOURNAL – a history journal – also by Colin Barr, in 2010. Turner underlined in his introduction that his was 'a historian's edition of the work';[40] as Barr explained:

> this is not the *Apologia* of the apologists, of those who have carried Newman to the precipice of sainthood. Rather, this edition represents Turner's attempt to recover the *Apologia* as a historical source – a work of literary and even spiritual brilliance, to be sure, but as historically unreliable as any autobiography, an unreliability all too often ignored or obscured in the religiously charged world of Newman studies . . . As for the text, the editing is careful, the editorial interventions useful and unobtrusive, and the choice of the 1865 Longman edition (omitting the exchange with Kingsley) reasonable.

[38] Idem, *John Henry Newman: a biography*, Oxford 1988, pp. viii–ix; 2nd edn, Oxford 2009, 746 (my italics).

[39] http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newstopics/religion/5214156/Cardinal-John-Newman-poised-for-beatification-after-ruling.html.

[40] Newman, *Apologia* (Turner edn), p. vii.

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He added, presciently: 'It is tempting to say that it cannot be ignored by Newman scholars, but that is perhaps too optimistic.'[41]

(5) This takes us to the nub of the matter: the multiple criticisms which Turner's reviewers tendered of his method and conclusions, and Duffy's restatement of a good many of them. Cardinal among these was Turner's deduction from what Duffy calls 'psycho-sexual' or 'cod-psychological speculations'.[42] The 'cod' is of course mischievous. Turner's candidly were psychological speculations, but since there are no psychological speculations whose legitimacy keepers of the flame will admit, these become 'cod-psychological speculations'. Turner's acknowledgements made clear that he had sought numerous professional counsels in this respect (including Braxton McKee, a professor of psychiatry at Yale with expertise in psychoanalysis and sexuality). There was, therefore, nothing 'cod' about them. What would Duffy, and other critics of this aspect of Turner's work, have to say of a secularist historian who wrote consistently of Newman's 'cod-spiritual' journey? Would the psychoanalytic approach *per se* have been inadmissible if it had generated a different set of propositions? It is hard to imagine Turner's critics dismissing hypotheses which the author repeatedly averred were 'speculative and tendentious'[43] as, well, 'speculative' and 'tendentious',[44] if those hypotheses were that Newman was by nature charitable, eirenic, devoid of ego and heterosexual. And it is worth underlining that far from all authorities repudiated them. In the *Historical Journal*, Jeffrey Cox – an historian – whom Duffy quotes very selectively, judged Turner's 'alternative story' to the self-fashioning of the *Apologia* 'a new narrative of Newman's path to Rome', and the book 'an extraordinary achievement'.[45] And David Newsome – an historian – who has written extensively and empathetically of Tractarianism and especially its converts, and writing in that fulcrum of anti-Catholic sentiment, *The Tablet*, pronounced the book 'most impressively researched' and thought Turner's construction of Newman's motives at the time of his conversion, particularly his desire to preserve a quasi-monastic life amid young male admirers, 'a plausible interpretation of the actuality'.[46]

[41] Colin Barr, review, this JOURNAL lxi (2010), 652.

[42] Duffy, 'A reply', 536.

[43] Turner, *John Henry Newman*, 631, 635.

[44] Ker, 'Slow road to Rome', 32; Nockles review, 672–3; John T. Ford, book review, *Catholic Historical Review* lxxxix (Oct. 2003), 790; Christopher Zealley, 'Review article', *Anglican and Episcopal History* lxxiii (June 2004), 209, 210; Sheridan Gilley, 'Written with learning, not with love', *Church Times*, 21 Feb. 2003, 17; Anderson, 'An intolerant sort of liberal', 53–4; Jaki, 'Newman, an "apostate"?', 42; James J. Buckley, 'A new Newman? Two accounts of England's most famous convert', *Weekly Standard*, 5 May 2003, 42; Cunningham review, 146; Oakes, 'Newman's liberal problem', 46, 47; George W. Rutler, 'Newman's own Church', *National Review*, 14 Oct. 2002, 66.

[45] Jeffrey Cox, book review, *HJ* xlviii (2005), 590–2.

[46] David Newsome, 'Warts and all', *The Tablet*, 26 Oct. 2002, 22.

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Perhaps in justice we might hear from the late Frank Turner on the matter. Turner – whom I briefly met once at a conference in 2009, who did not know of my proposed article and with whom I did not therefore discuss it in the slightest degree – wrote to me in the aftermath of its appearance. This was to express his thanks for my defence not of the book's arguments – with a number of which, as he recognised, I took issue, and for all of which only the author could be responsible – but of its method and purpose. Foregrounded in his mail was this remark:

> I appreciate your grasping how surprised I was by the honing in on 11 pages regarding Newman's sexuality. I cannot tell you how many times these pages were written and rewritten in consultation with serious professional historians and others qualified to comment. I can only surmise that the Newman camp is so worried and anxious about the subject that they have become fixated on it. Also by concentrating on it, they were able to ignore all the other research particularly on the character of the Tracts, Newman's self-constructed Catholicism, and the problematic circumstances surrounding his actual reception into the Roman Catholic Church.[47]

'Fixated' seems to me a reasonable characterisation of the response of Catholic reviewers to this infinitesimal portion of the book. Duffy emphasises – dismissing my 'quantitative assessment' that they comprised '1·5 per cent of the book's content' – the 'very prominent role of such speculations in Turner's overall project'.[48] I persist in the view that these speculations loomed far larger in the fevered minds of Turner's Catholic reviewers than in his pages, and certainly than in the minds of most lay academic readers, who have been baffled by the commotion.

(6) Duffy's wider critique of Turner's arguments[49] is simultaneously pertinent, warmly welcome, and otiose. I surely could not have been any clearer that my article was intended as a defence of Turner's purpose and method, and not in any simple sense of his conclusions, for which only their author was properly answerable. I myself problematised Turner's interpretations in manifold respects, stating baldly that there were 'numerous legitimate critical reflections which might be made of Turner's biography', and spending several pages adumbrating them, some drawn – with overt acknowledgment and citation – from other commentary, and some my own. Let us count the ways. (i) I questioned 'the sustainability of Turner's central and abiding distinction between the anti-liberalism which Newman – and, following him, scores of later chroniclers and celebrants – held to characterise the Oxford Movement, and the anti-Evangelicalism which Turner insisted was paramount'. I cited

[47] Email to the author, 6 Sept. 2010.
[48] Duffy, 'A reply', 536; Skinner, 'The reception of Turner's *Newman*', 771.
[49] Duffy, 'A reply', 539–47.

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Jeffrey Cox as 'one of several commentators to retort that Turner's substitution of "evangelicalism" for "liberalism" was an oversimplification which failed to recognise how often Tractarians used evangelicalism "as a metaphor for the broader ills of modern society"'.[50] Evangelicalism, in other words, might be conceived as but one of the species of liberalism, and simply its most obvious manifestation in European theology; for a High-Church Oxford don of the 1830s to attack Evangelicalism was therefore simply to attack liberalism at its closest quarter.[51] (ii) I suggested (with citations of Ian Ker and Sheridan Gilley) that 'even if accepting the crucial, central distinction between liberalism and Evangelicalism, there remains plenty of evidence for the authenticity of the Anglican Newman's anti-liberalism'.[52] (iii) I suggested (with citations of Jeffrey Cox, W. R. Ward and Grayson Carter) that Turner's 'fairly monolithic treatment of nineteenth-century Evangelicalism reifies it, or imposes upon it a false homogeneity'.[53] (iv) I suggested (with citation of James Pereiro) that 'key departures such as Newman's theory of development had an earlier gestation than Turner allows'.[54] (v) I argued that 'an aggressive dichotomy between Tractarianism and evangelicalism can obscure the spiritual or sentimental affinities between these movements (a perception pre-eminently owed to Yngve Brilioth and pursued by Elisabeth Jay and many others since)'.[55] (vi) I argued that 'the preoccupation with Evangelicalism can obscure Newman's and Tractarianism's often startling and more striking animus towards the old high-church party, or Hackney Phalanx'. (vii) I argued that 'Turner excessively projects Newman's idiosyncrasies onto the wider Oxford Movement and therefore in some respects misrepresents the latter.'[56] My critical reflections on the book were wider ranging and more schematic than any in those of its hostile reviews, which were largely confined to the splenetic defence of Newman's personal character. Critical appraisal of the book is, as I said in the article, 'an entirely legitimate and indeed critically necessary scholarly exercise', so Duffy's contribution to that process is genuinely interesting and welcome.

[50] Skinner, 'The reception of Turner's *Newman*', 776–7; Cox review, 591.

[51] Skinner, 'The reception of Turner's *Newman*', 777; Nockles review, 670.

[52] Skinner, 'The reception of Turner's *Newman*', 777; Ker, 'Slow road to Rome', 32; Gilley, 'Written with learning, not with love', 17.

[53] Skinner, 'The reception of Turner's *Newman*', 777; Cox review, 591; W. R. Ward, book review, *Journal of Modern History* lxxvi (2004), 680–1; Grayson Carter, '"At no time conspicuous, as a party, for talent or learning": Newman and Evangelicalism', *Books & Culture: A Christian Review* (Jan./Feb. 2004), 19.

[54] Skinner, 'The reception of Turner's *Newman*', 777; James Pereiro, book review, *Recusant History* xxvi (2003), 526–31.

[55] Skinner, 'The reception of Turner's *Newman*', 776–7; Yngve Brilioth, *Three lectures on Evangelicalism and the Oxford Movement*, London 1934; Elisabeth Jay, *The Evangelical and Oxford Movements*, Cambridge 1993.

[56] Skinner, 'The reception of Turner's *Newman*', 776–7.

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The point my article sought to make – with reference to no fewer than thirty-one reviews – was precisely that only a small portion of them could get beyond their confessional agitation at the very legitimacy of exposing a saint to historical examination.

Duffy's extensive and in places perfectly sustainable critique of Turner's *Newman* aims at demonstrating that 'one does not have to be a credulous Newman acolyte to think that . . . Turner clung to a thesis in defiance of the facts'; that therefore 'We are not dealing here with "history versus hagiography"'.[57] The fundamental retort to this is that so many of the thirty-plus reviews which I cited did not premise their critique of Turner on a contested or alternative reading of historical material. Rather, they occupied the antecedent premise that – at its very crudest – it was simply improper to subject the Blessed John Henry Newman to historical inquiry (with Turner's *Newman* thus recast as David Friedrich Strauss's *Das Leben Jesu, kritisch bearbeitet*); but more widely and more insidiously, that it was wrong to contradict Newman's extensive and seductive construction of his own life – in his letters and diaries, and above all of course in the *Apologia* – and that anyone who does so must have some agenda beyond that of historical integrity. This is the epistemology of all Newman studies.

In frantically seeking to refute the topical suggestion that Newman was homosexual in the revised 2009 introduction apparently issued solely for that purpose, for example, Ker stated that the 1957 publication of Newman's *Autobiographical writings*, and the *Apologia*, 'made available all the evidence necessary to disprove any notion that Newman was homosexual in his inclinations'.[58] Just like that! Choose a congenial historical person, and quote him. Perhaps this is the methodological sense in which Duffy means that 'the ordinary rules of historical evidence are intelligible to anybody', for that is certainly simple enough.[59] As my article demonstrated, Ker is far from alone among Turner's Catholic critics in crudely rejecting the very legitimacy of questioning Newman's narratives of events. The Catholic theologian Lawrence S. Cunningham redirected interested parties to the late Vincent Ferrer Blehl's *Pilgrim journey: John Henry Newman, 1801–1845* of 2001, since it operated 'more with the hermeneutics of trust';[60] Blehl, a Jesuit priest, was the official 'Postulator of the Cause' of Newman's canonisation.[61] Reviewing Turner in the *Catholic Historical Review*, John T. Ford, of the Catholic University of America, held that Ker's *Newman* was the 'definitive biography' on the breathtaking grounds that it was a 'portrait of Newman as he would have wanted to be painted' – this, in what purports to be an academic history journal.[62] In the

[57] Duffy, 'A reply', 546–7.
[58] Ker, *John Henry Newman*, 748.
[59] Duffy, 'A reply', 534.
[60] Cunningham review, 145–6.
[61] http://www.newmanfriendsinternational.org/newman/?p=199.
[62] Ford review, 789.

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same fashion, Stanley L. Jaki asserted the superiority of the historical interpretations of 'the Catholic Newman, whose memory ought to be trusted more than Turner's',[63] a principle which, as I remarked in my article, would annul all historical inquiry.

If Newman's own correspondence from earlier decades at points flatly contradicts his self-conscious later constructions, which should we trust? This is, as I repeatedly emphasised, a fundamental difference of methodology. Duffy generously remarks that I 'persuasively documented' Newman's 'deviousness' in a 1999 article in this JOURNAL, which recovered Newman's manoeuvres to secure editorial control of the *British Critic* periodical in the late 1830s.[64] It is impossible to understand how anyone who accepts the conclusions of that article could not see that they raise rudimentary interpretative questions of virtually all pre-Turner Newman biography. This entirely incidental foray away from my real interests and into Newman biography showed that as editor Newman embarked on what in a note of 1837 he called an 'exclusion course' by which the *Critic*'s old High-Church, or Hackney Phalanx contributors were unceremoniously culled. (As an historian I was glad he did, for in consequence one could extrapolate Tractarian thought from the *Critic*'s pages with absolute confidence.) Assembling his correspondence in 1875, however, Newman appended a covering note to some of the *British Critic* manuscripts of the 1830s, claiming that in spite of a 'want of sympathy' he had 'wished to retain' the old High-Church reviewers. This statement is demonstrably, laughably, stupefyingly untrue; it is refuted by scores of letters.[65] And there are two possible explanations for it. One is that Newman deliberately sought to falsify the historical record; the other is that, in the autumn of an inconceivably productive and intellectually complex life, he forgot or grew seriously confused about some of its earlier lineaments. Those concerned with Newman's sanctity may be morally animated by the former possibility, but historians are methodologically animated by either. Either possibility, that is – whether Newman was lying, or whether he was amnesiac – compels us to seek corroboration for the claims and constructions which he made in later life. Now, you either think it is legitimate to question the veracity of what Newman claimed in later life, or you do not. Frank Turner, not because he was anti-Catholic, or Protestant, or secularist, or Satanist, or anything else, but because he was an historian, thought it uncontentiously

[63] Jaki, 'Newman, an "apostate"?', 39.

[64] Duffy, 'A reply', 537 n. 14; S. A. Skinner, 'Newman, the Tractarians, and the *British Critic*', this JOURNAL l (1999), 716–59. Duffy comments that Newman 'ruthlessly ousted the editor of a genteel High Church periodical' in the course of his article, 'A hero of the Church'.

[65] S. A. Skinner, *Tractarians and the 'condition of England': the social and political thought of the Oxford Movement*, Oxford 2004, 50–2.

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legitimate to do so. This was central to his purpose broadly in *John Henry Newman* and specifically with the *Apologia* in the Yale edition of 2008.

Newman's brilliant *Apologia*, written as a Catholic two to three decades after the Anglican crises which it addressed, ironically enjoys a fundamentalist *sola scriptura* authority in Newman studies. Depressingly, Duffy adheres to this tradition, closing with the suggestion that it is via the *Apologia* and not Frank Turner that we are better able to see Newman 'as a living man'.[66] Ker's review in the *TLS* insisted that it was inherently improper of Turner to regard Newman's autobiographical writings as 'unreliable',[67] and his subsequent defence of it insisted that 'the most important evidence as to the state of Newman's mind' – in the period up to 1845, note – was 'the *Apologia* and his correspondence'. This is not an historian's position. It is tautologically true that the *Apologia* is the most important evidence of the state of Newman's mind when he wrote it, in 1864. But it does not follow for a moment that the *Apologia* is a reliable guide to the state of Newman's mind in the period two to three decades earlier which he was reconstructing for posterity. That isn't to say that it isn't; it is to say that for that we require contextualisation and corroboration. The Newmaniacs think it improper for historians to require these of their subject because they entail distrust. This is not because such historians are anti-Newman, or anti-Catholic; it is because they are historians, and that is what historians do: they distrust. Stanley Jaki was outraged that 'Turner and his endorsers ... cannot trust Newman's own reconstructions of his own past'. Well, no, one cannot. It's nothing personal. Historians don't trust anyone's constructions of their own past without verification from contextual data. This is not 'deconstructionism',[68] or any other -ism: it is history.

Turner's treatment of the *Apologia*, of course – in both the biography and the 2008 Yale text – contributed to a long tradition in historical and literary criticism which has recognised that that incontestable masterpiece is 'an enormously elaborate and ingenious piece of special pleading';[69] a 'generic hybrid in which fictional technique is legitimately combined with factual intent'.[70] For, as Josef Altholz has cautioned, 'The ideal Newman biographer would read all the primary sources first ... and the *Apologia* last of all; but the reverse is invariably the case.'[71] Within respectable

[66] Duffy, 'A reply', 548; the phrase is Newman's: *Apologia* (Turner edn), 128.
[67] Ker, 'Slow road to Rome', 32.
[68] Jaki, 'Newman, an "apostate"?', 43.
[69] Lewis E. Gates, *Selections from the press writings of John Henry Cardinal Newman*, New York 1895, p. xix.
[70] William R. Siebenschuh, 'Art and evidence in Newman's *Apologia*', *Biography* iii (Fall 1980), 314–30.
[71] J. L. Altholz, 'The Tractarian moment: the incidental origins of the Oxford Movement', *Albion* xxvi (Summer 1994), 273.

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Tractarian scholarship itself (not altogether an oxymoron), Peter Nockles – no friend, as we saw, to Turner's broader biographical constructions – warned at the very opening to his widely acclaimed *The Oxford Movement in context* (1994) that 'Newman's *Apologia* is not accurate or balanced history', that 'On the contrary, it is best regarded as an example of . . . "rhetoricisation of history"', and that Newman himself 'never pretended that the *Apologia* was intended to be the objective account which some later partisan writers assumed'.[72] Newman admitted, as Walter Houghton noted many years ago in his elegant study of *The art of Newman's 'Apologia'*, that he had a much better memory for what he called 'anxieties and deliverances' than outer facts and circumstances.[73] The textual scholars Lewis E. Gates (1895), F. L. Cross (1933) and Houghton (1945), all made the fundamental and imperative distinction between the *Apologia* as literature and as history, duly questioning Newman's construction of conversion and suggesting that it obscured a much shorter-term reaction to the criticism of the early 1840s. Cross's nuanced and penetrating assessment bears repeating:

> The *Apologia* is probably the greatest autobiography in the English language. But to grant this is not to pronounce any opinion as to its historical accuracy. Its claims as a work of literature rest upon a different set of considerations from successfulness as a mere chronicle. In fact, we believe it can be shown that the *Apologia* gives a distinctly misleading account of the chief motives which led to the event to justify which the work was written. For, whereas in the *Apologia* the predominating factors which led to Newman's conversion are represented as being intellectual in character, the course of events shows that the really powerful motives were of a psychological nature and developed out of the acute circumstances connected with the publication of Tract 90. Newman's temperament was far too distrustful of reason for him ever to have been led to such a radical change on primarily intellectual grounds.
>
> In the *Apologia* there is a curious mixture of fiction and truth, of *Dichtung* and *Wahrheit*. In so far as the *Apologia* narrates the *doctrinal* considerations which had weighed with Newman, – and, of course, considerations of this character played their part, – it is exceptionally accurate . . . In matters of fact, serious errors cannot be detected in the *Apologia*. In so far as the representation is in error, – and we are convinced that it is fundamentally in error, – it is in the way the whole drama is staged.[74]

Houghton's book-length analysis of the *Apologia* concluded, with Cross, that 'psychological factors provided the necessary impetus to carry

[72] P. B. Nockles, *The Oxford Movement in context: Anglican High Churchmanship, 1760–1857*, Cambridge 1994, 2.

[73] W. E. Houghton, *The art of Newman's 'Apologia'*, London–New Haven 1945, 22. The quotation is from Newman's *Grammar of assent*.

[74] F. L. Cross, *John Henry Newman*, London 1933, 132–3.

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Newman's intellectual conclusions from theory into action'.[75] Turner's ensuing scholarly juxtaposition of Newman's later claims with his much earlier situation was a monumental and exhaustive pursuit of these perceptions.

(7) Lastly, Duffy questions my claim that 'Turner's book was written out of "a conviction of Newman's towering importance"' and disdains the 'lip-service Turner may have paid to Newman's greatness'.[76] Academics are generally guilty of making hyperbolic claims for the historical importance of those figures to whom they choose to devote their working lives, so this is an arresting charge. The suggestion that Frank Turner did not regard Newman as one of the titans of his age is risible, but to disregard the risible in the criticisms of Turner's *Newman* would be to disregard the bulk of them. I said in my article that the 'irony of Turner's prohibition by the Newman industry is that, to anyone except the Newmaniac reader, his *Newman* will be construed as a major testament to its subject's historical importance',[77] and this is something which was recognised by a number of reviewers outside the Praetorian Guard: A. N. Wilson foresaw that the book would be 'dismissed by those who do not understand its implications as an attempt to cast a slur on the great man' and insisted that 'it does the opposite'; Digby Anderson remarked that Newman emerged from the book 'as more impressive because more human'; and Jeffrey Cox recognised that Turner's approach came from 'a deep intellectual and emotional engagement with Newman' and 'does nothing to diminish Newman's stature'.[78]

In *John Henry Newman* alone Turner unambiguously pronounced his subject a 'religious and theological genius', and beyond even that 'one of the foremost sage voices of late-Victorian intellectual as well as religious life'. He ennobled *The idea of a university* as 'the most influential work on the liberal education in the English language'. He judged the *Apologia* the 'most effective of all Victorian autobiographies'. And he therefore ultimately regarded Newman as someone who 'changed the religious and spiritual life of two major communions of the modern Christian world and beyond'.[79] These convictions drove Turner to produce scholarly editions of both of these works. His 1996 Yale edition of *The idea of a university* was premised on the text's 'extraordinary influence', and observed that 'thinking and rethinking through Newman's arguments, values, and presuppositions is to probe the intellectual and religious heritage of the West'.

[75] Houghton, *Newman's 'Apologia'*, 106.
[76] Duffy, 'A reply', 548; Skinner, 'The reception of Turner's *Newman*', 780.
[77] Skinner, 'The reception of Turner's *Newman*', 779.
[78] A. N. Wilson, 'What if he went the whole way?', *Literary Review* (Dec. 2002/Jan 2003), 25; Anderson, 'An intolerant sort of liberal', 53; Cox review, 590-2.
[79] Turner, *John Henry Newman*, 1, 640, 641.

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'The issues that Newman raised', Turner wrote, 'continue to be germane, and many are gaining new attention and relevance', adding that 'Newman's sense of the issues relevant to university life during the next century were almost prophetic', affirming 'the genius of Newman's work as a true classic of the Western tradition' and as 'one of the educational and literary masterpieces of the Western world', and placing Newman 'at the center of English intellectual life'.[80] Turner's ensuing edition of the *Apologia* equally unambiguously pronounced it a 'masterpiece', its author 'a brilliant theologian, perhaps the most brilliant of the modern Church of England', and 'the only Victorian author of Christian theological prose to enjoy a substantial, engaged transatlantic readership in 2000 as well as 1900'.[81]

Moreover, as historians of nineteenth-century Britain – and therefore few of Turner's critics – will know, Turner's engagement with Newman was the culmination of a much longer scholarly engagement in which Newman loomed very large indeed. Turner's acclaimed *Contesting cultural authority* of 1993, for example, was concerned with the lasting influence of a 'Victorian intellectual elite' to which Newman was central. His 'cultural apostasy' was presented – ahead of Darwin's and Ruskin's – as one of 'the foundation stones for the major elements of high Victorian culture'; through a body of writing which ranked as 'one of the monuments of the age', Newman 'shifted the entire centre of intellectual discourse'. All this was in the course of a highly original and suggestive analysis which juxtaposed Newman with Darwin in terms of their subversion of Victorian religious and cultural certainties (a theme to which Turner returned at the very end of *John Henry Newman*).[82] More widely still, Turner argued that the very 'outlook about the connection of religious ideas and society' which informed the approach of modern Victorian intellectual history was 'that John Henry Newman enunciated almost a century and a half ago' in his *Essay on the development of Christian doctrine* (1845).[83] It was Turner's elevation of Newman's importance – far beyond his influence not only within two communions, therefore, but for Victorian intellectual life, and even for the very manner in which we think about Victorian intellectual life – which culminated in the 752-page biographical study of 2002. Some 'lip-service'. Thus is forty years of distinguished and disinterested nineteenth-century scholarship swatted aside by a *fidei defensor*.

It is routinely observed that people are generally only stirred to comment when they disagree with something, rather than when they agree with it;

[80] J. H. Newman, *The idea of a university*, ed. Frank M. Turner, New Haven–London 1996, pp. ix, xiii, 257, 258, 285, 262–3.
[81] Idem, *Apologia* (Turner edn), pp. vii, 1, 106, 114.
[82] Turner, *John Henry Newman*, 640–1.
[83] Idem, *Contesting cultural authority: essays in Victorian intellectual life*, Cambridge 1993, 40–2, 71–2, 16–17, 48–55, and also pp. 26–9, 60–5.

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Duffy's own response is a specimen of that. It might therefore be significant that of the many emails or letters which I received in response to the article – I discount altogether passing comment from friends and acquaintances, and confine myself to what might be called 'independent' respondents whom I have overwhelmingly never met – only one was hostile. Here are some sample comments:

It is disturbing to see how being religious and being rigorous (or truthful) conflict for some. It is encouraging to see excellent scholarship and love of truth being extolled.

We are all perplexed by the recent RC reception of *Newman* . . . thanks for a very helpful and needed review. The Newman folks need more pieces like yours.

I write to congratulate you on your piece in the *JEH*, which I have just read with great interest and imagination.

I have very much enjoyed reading your review article about the critical reaction to Frank Turner's book on Newman . . . You are absolutely right, of course. There is no need to make Newman a plaster saint for him to be a real saint. He emerges from Turner's book, as several have said, a much more interesting and fascinating character.

Your point about the hagiographer and the historian, the theologian and the historian is particularly well made . . . thank you for a stimulating and delightfully pugnacious and astute article.

I felt I must drop a note to express my huge enjoyment and appreciation of what you said. Turner's book was a breath of realism entering the stifling world of Newman studies, and the hysterical reaction of Turner's critics which you describe was the clearest proof of the unhealthy atmosphere surrounding Newman at present. Indeed, with all the nonsense accompanying his beatification it has become almost impossible to detect the man because of the incense raised by his adulators.

You are quite correct to assert again the historian's task when approaching someone like Newman. Churchmen are too prone to forget that the material of sainthood is a *human* life, with all its quirks.

You fairly pull the tsunami of criticism apart, before putting the whole business of Newman studies in proper historical perspective.

I have just read your piece on Turner. Absolutely splendid. It all much needed to be said, and I think you do so admirably.[84]

[84] Extracts from emails received by the author and reproduced with their authors' permission.

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This is just the formal apex of a large number of strongly supportive comments. What is striking is that virtually all of these comments were from ordained Anglo- or Roman Catholics. If Duffy thinks that he speaks for some notional Catholic everyman, I think he is mistaken. *Securus judicat orbis terrarum.*

A great – though mortal – man once wrote that 'Truth is wrought out by many minds, working together freely.'[85] Duffy himself is fond of the quotation, deploying it more than once in his press articles celebrating Newman's legacy.[86] But the Newmaniacs should have sufficient respect for the fountainhead to ponder the academic context, and ongoing implications, of that formula. For in the letter from which it is taken, Newman was reflecting specifically on the necessity of allowing freedom of thought at Dublin University. It closed with these words: 'I suppose we must be worse, before we are better – because we do not recognise that we are bad.'[87]

[85] J. H. Newman to Robert Ornsby, 26 Mar. 1863, in *Letters and diaries of John Henry Newman*, xx, ed. C. S. Dessain, Oxford 1970, 426.
[86] Duffy, 'Newman offers church a candle in the dark', 33, and '"Man of sacristy"'.
[87] Newman to Ornsby, 26 Mar. 1863, *Letters and diaries of John Henry Newman*, xx. 426.

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