NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://ncronline.org)

Blast From the Past: Newman

Michael Sean Winters | Sep. 14, 2010 Distinctly Catholic

As mentioned yesterday, the occasion for Newman's great Apologia was an exchange of letters between himself and the Rev. Charles Kingsley after the latter had written that Newman, and the Catholic Church generally, did not value truth. Yesterday, I printed Newman's initial letter to the editors of the magazine where Kingsley's charge appeared. Kingsley and Newman exchanged more letters that can be read here [1].

Newman concluded the correspondence with an extraordinarily witty reposte:

I shall attempt a brief analysis of the foregoing correspondence; and I trust that the wording which I shall adopt will not offend against the gravity due both to myself and to the occasion. It is impossible to do justice to the course of thought evolved in it without some familiarity of expression.

Mr. Kingsley begins then by exclaiming,-" 0 the chicanery, the wholesale fraud, the vile hypocrisy, the conscience-killing tyranny of Rome I We have not far to seek for an evidence of it. There's Father Newman to wit: one living specimen is worth a hundred dead ones. He, a Priest writing of Priests, tells us that lying is never any harm."

I interpose., " You are taking a most extraordinary liberty with my name. If I have said this, tell me when and where." Mr. Kingsley replies: " You said it, Reverend Sir, in a Sermon which you preached, when a Protestant, as Vicar of St. Mary's, and published in 1844; and I could read you a very salutary lecture on the effects which that Sermon had at the time on my own opinion of you."

I make answer: " Oh ... Not, it seems, as a Priest speaking of Priests;-but let us have the passage."

Mr. Kingsley relaxes: " Do you know, I like your tone. From your tone I rejoice, greatly rejoice, to be able to believe that you did not mean what you said."

I rejoin: " Mean it! I maintain I never said it, whether as a Protestant or as a Catholic."

Mr. Kingsley replies: " I waive that point."

I object: " Is it possible! What? waive the main question! I either said it or I didn't. You have made a monstrous charge against me; direct, distinct, public. You are bound to prove it as directly, as distinctly, as publicly;-or to own you can't."

Well," says Mr. Kingsley, " if you are quite sure you did not say it, I'll take your word for it; I really will."

My word - I am dumb. Somehow I thought that it was my word that happened to be on trial. The word of a Professor of lying, that he does not lie!
But Mr. Kingsley re-assures me: " We are both gentlemen," he says: " I have done as much as one English gentleman can expect from another."

I begin to see: he thought me a gentleman at the very time that he said I taught lying on system. After all, it is not I, but it is Mr. Kingsley who did not mean what he said. " Habemus confitentem reum."

...

While I feel then that Mr. Kingsley's February explanation is miserably insufficient in itself for his January enormity, still I feel also that the Correspondence, which lies between these two acts of his, constitutes a real satisfaction to those principles of historical and literary justice to which he has given so rude a shock.

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All this week in his Distinctly Catholic blog, Michael Sean Winters is interviewing a variety of Newman scholars:

- Fr. Joseph Komonchak, taught ecclesiology at Catholic University, wrote his dissertation on Newman [21]
- Christopher Pramuk, Assistant professor of Theology at Xavier University in Cincinnati [22]
- Ian Ker, Professor at Oxford University and author of a Newman biography [23]
- The Very Reverend Richard Duffield, the Provost of the Birmingham Oratory [24]
- Archbishop Vincent Nichols, the Archbishop of Westminster and Primate of England [25]

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