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NEWMAN ON '*SENSUS FIDELIUM*' AND MARIOLOGY

Just as Newman's well-known *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* is the "almost inevitable starting point for an investigation of development of doctrine,"¹ so his treatise *On Consulting the Faithful in Matters of Doctrine* is almost invariably a reference point for discussing the role of the laity vis-à-vis the magisterium of the church. For example, one commentator, after surveying the meaning of *sensus fidelium* in patristic, medieval, and reformation sources, recently remarked:

Moving into the thought of Newman is a refreshing experience. And this for several reasons. First, until his work, very little attempt had been made to study the actual historical sources. Newman's approach to the *sensus fidelium* is *a posteriori*, firmly grounded in historical research. Secondly, he gives, to my mind, the most developed systematic treatment of the question, mainly because it is built on what actually happened, in the main, in the Church's history.²

While Newman is customarily considered a seminal theorist on both doctrinal development and *sensus fidelium*, he is usually better known for his personal devotion to Mary, than for his Mariology. The following comment is a typical judgment:

Newman was no scientific Mariologist (he would, in this sense,

¹ J. Pelikan, *Development of Christian Doctrine* (New Haven/London, 1969) 3; Pelikan's treatment of Newman's *Criteria of Authenticity* (pp. 12-24) succinctly points up their Protestant antitheses.

² W. M. Thompson, "*Sensus Fidelium*" and *Infallibility*, in *American Ecclesiastical Review* 167 (1973) 463.

have disclaimed the title even of scientific theologian) but he laid down the lines which succeeding writers have followed, he mapped out the territory; and he wrote a very substantial Mariology which is generally known not by that name but as the Letter to Pusey.³

In part, this conventional view is only a symptom of a more general neglect of Newman's theology in English-speaking circles until the middle of the present century.⁴ Nonetheless, and in a way quite surprising, "historians of Marian theology sometimes single out Newman and Scheeben as the best of the nineteenth-century writers on the subject."⁵

Fortunately, the link between Newman's Mariology and his views on *sensus fidelium* is one he personally forged. His essay *On Consulting the Faithful in Matters of Doctrine*⁶ re-

³ G. Corr, *Mariology in England*, in *Marianum* 10 (1948) 114-5; Newman's only *ex professo* work on Mary is *A Letter Addressed to the Rev. E. B. Pusey, D.D., on Occasion of his Eirenicon* (1866), reprinted in the standard edition of *Certain Difficulties Felt by Anglicans in Catholic Teaching* 2:1-170 [hereafter cited *Diff.*]. Edward Bouverie Pusey (1800-82), regius professor of Hebrew and canon of Christ Church, was a leader with Newman in the Oxford Movement (cf. T. Bokenkotter, *New Catholic Encyclopedia* 11:1051-2). On Newman as theologian, cf. N. Lash, *Newman on Development* (Shepherdstown, West Virginia, 1975) 23-27, and *Was Newman a Theologian?* in *Heythrop Journal* 17 (1976) 322-5.

⁴ For example, less than fifty years ago, Francis Bacchus and Henry Tristram, members of Newman's Birmingham Oratory, could write, appropriately in a foreign tongue: "l'Angleterre n'apporte guère de contribution à l'étude de la philosophie et de la théologie de Newman" (*Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique* 11/1, 398). On the emergence of Newman studies in Europe, cf. the articles by W. Becker, A. Boekraad, and B. Dupuy in *The Rediscovery of Newman*, edited by J. Coulson, A. Allchin (London/Melbourne, 1967) 47-194. For an ecumenical revaluation, cf. J. Coulson, A. Allchin, M. Trevor, *Newman: a portrait restored* (London/Melbourne/New York, 1965).

⁵ M. O'Carroll, *Our Lady in Newman and Vatican II*, in *Downside Review* 89 (1971) 38; cf. p. 48: "In 1845, before his conversion to the Catholic Church, Newman as a theologian of our Lady, was unique; he even excelled many Catholics of his age." Matthias Joseph Scheeben (1835-88) was for nearly three decades professor of theology at the Cologne seminary (cf. C. Aherne, *New Catholic Encyclopedia* 12, 1122).

⁶ Edited with an introduction by J. Coulson (New York, 1961; hereafter cited as *Coulson*).

lates the *sensus fidelium* to a specific historical case, the definition of the Immaculate Conception. At first sight, this connection might seem to be occasioned by the convenience of appealing to what was for Newman a contemporary event in order to sustain a disputed theological thesis. In one major respect at least, the relationship is not merely accidental or circumstantial; both topics have patristic origins. Just as his views on the role of the laity in the church, similarly, "the study he had made of Arianism thus led him to understand Catholic glorification of Mary."⁷

On the one hand, Newman's views on the laity's role in the Church antedated the Oxford Movement. Thus, contrary to some conventional appraisals, the Oxford Movement, at least in Newman's mind, was initiated neither as a defense of ecclesiastical privilege nor as a forum for academic theological discussion; rather, the movement aimed not only to make the Church of England independent of erastian incursions but also to make the Church once more an institution of the people.⁸ Although Newman's expectation of enthusiastic support for the movement's social ideals was not realized while he was an Anglican, his confidence in the discernment of the laity carried over into his Catholic years. For example, a half-dozen years after becoming a Roman Catholic, Newman, provocatively stated in his *Lectures on the Present Position of Catholics in England*:

I want a laity, not arrogant, not rash in speech, not disputations, but men who know their religion, who enter into it, who know just where they stand, who know what they hold, and what they do not, who know their creed so well, that they can give an account of it, who know so much of history that they can defend it. . . . I have

⁷ M. O'Carroll, in *Downside Review* 89 (1971) 45.

⁸ Cf. J. Griffin, *The Anglican Politics of Cardinal Newman*, in *Anglican Theological Review* 55 (1973) 434-43, and *The Social Implications of the Oxford Movement*, in *Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church* 44 (1975) 155-65.

no apprehension you will be the worse Catholics for familiarity with these subjects provided you cherish a vivid sense of God above, and keep in mind that you have souls to be judged and to be saved. In all times the laity have been the measure of the Catholic spirit; they saved the Irish Church three centuries ago, and they betrayed the Church in England.⁹

Although Newman's view of the laity in the Church displays a marked continuity from his Anglican through his Roman Catholic years, his view is also characterized by what may be called "counterpoint": just as his insistence on the divine authority of the Anglican bishops gave considerable annoyance to his more protestant-tempered co-religionists, subsequently, his emphasis on the importance of the laity in the Church highly incensed many of his fellow Roman Catholics of an ultramontane bent.¹⁰

These characteristics of continuity and counterpoint are again evident in Newman's Marian teaching. On the one hand, his devotion to Mary, patroness of the college where he was fellow and of the university church where he was vicar, was uncommon for an Anglican of that time.¹¹ For example, in a sermon preached on the feast of the Annunciation over a year before the beginning of the Oxford Movement, Newman asked his audience:

Who can estimate the holiness and perfection of her, who was chosen to be the Mother of Christ? . . . what must have been the transcendent purity of her, whom the Creator Spirit condescended

⁹ Lecture 9, 4 (London: Burns, Oates, n.d.) 390-1.

¹⁰ H. F. Davis, *Le rôle et l'apostolat de la hiérarchie et du laïcat dans la théologie de l'Anglaise chez Newman*, in *L'Ecclésiologie au XIX^e siècle* (*Unam sanctam* 34), by M. Nédoncelle et al. (Paris, 1960) 335.

¹¹ Cf. C. S. Dessain, *Cardinal Newman's Teaching about the Blessed Virgin Mary*, in *Mother of Jesus* 11 (London, 1971) 2-6; F. J. Friedel, *The Mariology of Cardinal Newman* (New York/Cincinnati/Chicago, 1928) 2-87.

to overshadow with His miraculous presence?¹²

If Newman's question was rhetorical, his response was provocative, as far as his audience was concerned:

But, as to St. Mary, Christ derived His manhood from her, and so had an especial unity of nature with her; . . . For truly, she is raised above the condition of sinful beings, though by nature a sinner; she is brought near to God, yet is but a creature, and seems to lack her fitting place in our limited understanding neither too high nor too low.¹³

Yet in large measure, Newman shared with Anglican contemporaries an aversion for "mariolatry" and a fear that devotion to Mary might supplant devotion to Christ.¹⁴ And as long as he remained an Anglican, he conscientiously refrained from the invocation of the saints proscribed by the Thirty-Nine Articles.¹⁵ However, by the end of his Anglican period, he had arrived at the conviction that devotion to Mary as *Theotokos* is a necessary safeguard for preserving an authentically patristic Christology:

And if we take a survey of Europe at least, we shall find that those religious communions which are characterized by the observance of St. Mary, are not the Churches which have ceased to adore her Eternal Son, but such as have renounced that observance. The regard for His glory, which was professed in that keen jealousy of her exaltation, has not been supported by the event. They who were accused of worshipping a creature in His stead, still worship

¹² *Parochial and Plain Sermons* (London: Longmans, Green, 1902), 2, 131-2.

¹³ *Ibid.* 135; as a result of this sermon, Newman was accused of teaching the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception.

¹⁴ H. F. Davis, *La Mariologie de Newman, in Maria, Etudes sur la Sainte Vierge*, edited by H. du Manoir (Paris, 1954) 3, 533-52.

¹⁵ H. F. Davis, *Newman and Our Lady*, in *Clergy Review* 34 (1950) 370.

Him; their accusers, who hoped to worship Him so purely, where obstacles to the development of their principles have been removed, have ceased to worship Him altogether.¹⁶

In a sense, Newman's entrance into the Roman Catholic Church liberated his expressions of devotion to Mary; for example, the first oratory that he established was named "Mary-vale" and the final one was dedicated to the Immaculate Conception; moreover, for his confirmation-name, he chose "Mary." Collaterally, his study of the patristic teaching on Mary not only corroborated his conclusion that the Roman Catholic Church was identical with the Church of the early centuries, but also enabled him to accept the dogma of the Immaculate Conception "as an immediate inference, from the primitive doctrine that Mary is the second Eve."¹⁷ As he rhetorically asked in his *Letter to Pusey*: "If Eve was raised above human nature by that indwelling moral gift which we call grace, is it rash to say that Mary had even a greater grace?"¹⁸

Simultaneously, there is a characteristic counterpoint in Newman's Marian devotion and doctrine in his Roman Catholic years. In contrast to the exuberant Italian devotions introduced into England by some of his fellow-converts, Newman's devotion to Mary, while deeply fervent, was characterized by

¹⁶ *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* (1845 edition), edited by J. Cameron (Harmondsworth/Baltimore/Victoria/Markham, 1974) 434; this passage was subsequently "catholicized" by Newman for the revised edition of 1878 (London/New York/Bombay: Longmans, Green, 1900) 426; also, see Newman's statement: "The votaries of Mary do not exceed the true faith, unless the blasphemers of her Son came up to it. The Church of Rome is not idolatrous, unless Arianism is orthodox" (*ibid.*, 1845 ed., ch. 8, sect. 1, p. 408; 1878 ed., ch. 4, sect. 2, #8, p. 144); hereafter cited as *Dev.* with indication of the appropriate edition. A similar observation on the relation of Marian devotion and Christology is found in the *Letter to Pusey* in *Diff.* 2, 91-3, 147.

¹⁷ *Diff.* 2, 49; cf. *The Letters and Diaries of John Henry Newman*, edited by C. Dessain (London, etc., 1967 ff; hereafter cited *L&D*), 19, 346-7, 361-70.

¹⁸ *Diff.* 2, 45.

"no admixture of rhetoric, no taint of extravagant affection."¹⁹ For example, in his *Apologia pro Vita Sua*, Newman recalled writing in the waning years of his Anglican life to Professor Russell²⁰ at Maynooth, asking whether an English translation of St. Alphonsus Liguori's sermons had omitted anything. Russell replied that there were omissions in one sermon about the Blessed Virgin. Newman commented:

This omission, in the case of a book intended for Catholics, at least showed that such passages as are found in the works of Italian authors were not acceptable to every part of the Catholic world. Such devotional manifestations in honour of our Lady have been my great *crux* as regards Catholicism; I say frankly, I do not fully enter into them now; I trust I do not love her the less, because I cannot enter into them. They may be fully explained and defended; but sentiment and taste do not run with logic: they are suitable for Italy, but they are not suitable for England.²¹

From a doctrinal viewpoint, Newman's Mariology is decidedly incarnational: "all exaltation of Mary is the service of Christ."²² Correspondingly, honoring Mary is a way of assuring reverence for Christ: "If Mary is the Mother of God, Christ must be literally Emmanuel, God with us."²³ For ex-

¹⁹ *Diff.* 2, 62; for an overview of the attempted "romanizing" of English Catholicism, cf. J. D. Holmes, *English Catholicism from Wiseman to Bourne*, in *Clergy Review* 61 (1976) 58-60; G. Corr, *Marianum* 10 (1948) 114-21, contrasted Newman's continuing influence in English-speaking Mariology with "zealous" types.

²⁰ Charles William Russell (1812-80), president of Maynooth at the time Newman wrote the *Apologia* was described as having "perhaps, more to do with my conversion than any one else" (Ch. 4, #2; in the edition prepared by D. J. DeLaura [New York: Norton, 1968], p. 153; cf. *L&D* 11, 354-5; F. Friedel, *Mariology*, pp. 59-65).

²¹ *Apologia*, Ch. 4, #2 (DeLaura ed., p. 154); a similar passage appears in the *Letter to Pusey* (*Diff.* 2, 113-5); cf. T. A. Murphy, *Newman and Devotion to Our Lady*, in *Irish Ecclesiastical Record* 72 (1949) 385-96.

²² H. F. Davis, in *Clergy Review* 32 (1939) 374.

²³ *Discourses Addressed to Mixed Congregations* (London: Longmans, Green, 1893) 348.

ample, in reply to Pusey, who wanted a moratorium on the Roman Catholic development of further Marian doctrines, Newman replied: "Men sometimes wonder that we call her Mother of life, of mercy, of salvation; what are all these titles compared to that one name, Mother of God?"²⁴ However, if he was understandably unwilling to limit the work of the Holy Spirit in the development of Marian doctrines,²⁵

... Newman did not see the need to *define* doctrines about which Catholics were agreed. Definitions were not a luxury but a painful necessity. And he doubted whether the definitions of the Immaculate Conception or the Assumption had led or would lead to an *increase in devotion*.²⁶

In overview, then, Newman's theology of *sensus fidelium* and of Mary can be traced to a common origin in his patristic studies;²⁷ at the same time, it must be admitted that their thematic apposition was circumstantial. While any theological work must be read in the light of its historical context, this is particularly necessary in the case of Newman, who found

²⁴ Diff. 2, 63.

²⁵ H. Davis, *Maria* 3, 551.

²⁶ C. Dessain, *Mother of Jesus*, 12. Newman showed a similar reserve in regard to the definition of infallibility; cf. J. Altholz, *The Vatican Decrees Controversy, 1874-1875*, in *Catholic Historical Review* 57 (1971-72) 583-605; C. Dessain, *What Newman taught in Manning's Church*, in *Infallibility in the Church*, by A. Farrer et al. (London, 1968) 59-80; J. Holmes, *Cardinal Newman and the first Vatican Council*, in *Annuaire Historiae Conciliorum* 1 (1969) 374-98, and *Liberal Catholicism and Newman's LETTER TO THE DUKE OF NORFOLK*, in *Clergy Review* 60 (1975) 498-511.

²⁷ Newman's first major theological work, *The Arians of the Fourth Century*, was published in 1833, the year that also marked the beginning of the Oxford Movement; cf. R. Greene, *John Henry Newman's Theology of Doctrinal Development in Reference to the Oxford Movement, 1833-1843* (Catholic University of America dissertation, 1975) 21-108; R. O'Donnell, *Newman on Faith and Dogma, the Anglican Years* (Catholic University of America dissertation, 1973) 161-233.

it practically impossible to write without a cause.²⁸ Admittedly, what was a matter of cause or provocation among Victorians might seem inconsequential today. However, just as Charles Kingsley's passing aspersion in a book review provoked Newman's literary masterpiece, the *Apologia pro Vita Sua*,²⁹ similarly, a chance editorial comment in *The Rambler* set the stage for Newman's presentation of his views on *sensus fidelium* and the Immaculate Conception.

*The RAMBLER Affair*³⁰

The *Rambler* was started in 1848 by John Moore Capes,³¹ a married Anglican clergyman, recently converted to Roman Catholicism. Newman, concerned about the suitable employment of married clerical converts as well as about the role of the laity in the church, was from the first sympathetic to this effort to publish a scholarly journal by and for the educated laity. If circulation was always small, still in retrospect at least, the *Rambler* managed to "set a standard never surpassed since among English Catholics."³² After a decade of publication,

²⁸ In his journal, Newman noted that he needed a "call" to write and "without such a stimulus" was unable to write; "the Essay on Assent is nearly the only exception;" *John Henry Newman, Autobiographical Writings*, edited by H. Tristram (New York, 1957) 272-3.

²⁹ Kingsley (1819-75), Anglican clergyman, novelist, poet, and professor of modern history at Cambridge (1860-69), opposed the Oxford Movement. For background material on the *Apologia*, cf. the essays in the DeLaura edition (pp. 423-503) and the introduction of the Svaglic edition (Oxford, 1967; pp. vii-lx) and also *Newman's APOLOGIA: a Classic Reconsidered*, edited by V. Blehl and F. Connolly (New York, 1964).

³⁰ For more extensive treatment, cf. W. T. Patterson, *Newman: Pioneer for the Layman* (Washington/Cleveland, 1968) 18-70; S. D. Femiano, *Infallibility of the Laity* (New York, 1967) 71-117.

³¹ Capes (1812-89) became a Roman Catholic a few months before Newman but later rejoined the Church of England and attacked Newman for accepting the definition of infallibility; Capes rejoined the Catholic Church in the last years of his life (cf. *LE&D* 11, 335-6).

³² C. S. Dessain, *John Henry Newman* (London 1966; London/Stanford, 1971²) 111.

Capes sold the review to a group that included Richard Simpson³³ and Sir John Acton.³⁴

The new management's attempt candidly to discuss a variety of controversial issues such as the debility of seminary education or the negotiability of papal temporal power quickly placed the editors at odds with the Catholic hierarchy, which, given its usually defensive posture, hardly welcomed the disclosure of ecclesiastical shortcomings or any criticism of episcopal decisions. The first clash was occasioned by an article of Acton in which St. Augustine was called the father of Jansenism; the resulting annoyance was anything but allayed by a subsequent article by Döllinger³⁵ in support of his friend and former student.

Then in January, 1859, the *Rambler* carried an article by Scott Nasmyth Stokes³⁶ on the cooperation of the Roman Catholic hierarchy with the recently appointed royal commission on elementary education. On the government's side, the issue was public control over the subsidies given to denominational schools. In the hierarchy's view, it was a question of freedom in religious instruction; the bishops were concerned by the fact that the commission would inquire into the methods of

³³ Simpson (1820-76), a former Anglican vicar converted to Roman Catholicism in 1846, was "an outspoken controversialist and talented essayist with a gifted style and a proclivity for involved theological questions" (D. McElrath, *New Catholic Encyclopedia* 13, 232).

³⁴ John Emerich Edward Dalberg Acton (1834-1902), Whig member of Parliament (1859-65), raised to the peerage in 1869, and named regius professor of modern history at Cambridge in 1895, was "the most far-sighted Catholic historical thinker of his generation" (H. MacDougall, *New Catholic Encyclopedia* 1, 102).

³⁵ Johannes Joseph Ignaz von Döllinger (1799-1890), renowned for his erudition as professor of Church history at Munich, opposed Vatican I's definition of infallibility and was subsequently excommunicated (cf. S. Tonsor, *New Catholic Encyclopedia* 4, 956-60).

³⁶ Stokes (1812-91) a convert to Roman Catholicism in 1845, was one of the government-appointed inspectors of schools and "the leading Catholic lay authority on the school question" (C. Dessain, *Newman*, 111; cf. Coulson, 9-12; *L&D* 11, 357).

religious teaching—an area considered outside the surveillance of non-Catholics. Stokes argued that an isolationist attitude would prove self-defeating; not only was there some danger that the government's support of denominational schools might be replaced by a system of state-supported schools; more positively, inspection would show not only that the governmental grants had been used appropriately but also that the schools were in fact training future citizens to be both useful and loyal to the country as well as committed to their religion.

Although the article had been written before the publication of the hierarchy's refusal of cooperation, almost inevitably, Stokes' remarks were construed as disloyal. Several of the bishops decided that the *Rambler* should be publicly censured—an action that would have effectively put it out of business—unless its editor, Richard Simpson, were replaced. It fell to Newman both to persuade Simpson to resign and to assume the editorship in his place. "It was rather like asking him to carry a box of explosives through a burning house."²⁷

Newman's intentions in this anomalous situation understandably appear mixed: on the one hand, to prevent episcopal suppression of the review and so to preserve an organ of expression for the educated laity; on the other, to help the bishops through a difficulty and so to keep peace among Catholics. From a more practical standpoint, "Newman believed that the review had placed itself in its present false position for three reasons: it had treated of theology proper, it had done so in magazine fashion, and it had allowed laymen to do so."²⁸ Thus, in his mediatorial role as editor, Newman hoped to save the situation by changing the *Rambler's* tone, though not its principles.

In the first issue that he edited, Newman attempted to end the criticism of the bishops' attitude to the royal commission, first by publishing extracts from the pastorals of Wiseman²⁹

²⁷ M. Trevor, *Newman's Journey* (Glasgow, 1974) 193.

²⁸ Coulson, 6.

²⁹ Nicholas Wiseman (1802-65), Cardinal and Archbishop of West-

and Ullathorne,⁴⁰ and secondly, by some editorial remarks that were intended to mollify both sides:

Acknowledging then most fully the prerogatives of the episcopate, we do unfeignedly believe . . . that their Lordships really desire to know the opinion of the laity on subjects in which the laity are especially concerned. If even in the preparation of a dogmatic definition the faithful are consulted, as lately in the instance of the Immaculate Conception, it is at least as natural to anticipate such an act of kind feeling and sympathy in great practical questions, out of the condescension which belongs to those who *are forma facti gregis ex animo*. If our words or tone were disrespectful, we deeply grieve and apologize for such a fault; but surely we are not disrespectful in thinking, and in having thought, that the bishops would like to know the sentiments of an influential portion of the laity before they took any step which perhaps they could not recall.⁴¹

Dr. John Gillow,⁴² professor of theology at Ushaw, immediately protested to Newman about the "very objectionable" words: "If even in the preparation of a dogmatic definition the faithful are consulted as lately in the instance of the Immaculate Conception." The explanations that Newman provided in his subsequent exchange of correspondence with Gillow⁴³

minster (1850-65), as rector of the English College first met Newman in 1832 on the latter's visit to Rome (cf. B. Fothergill, *Nicholas Wiseman* [London, 1963]; *New Catholic Encyclopedia* 14, 976-7).

⁴⁰ William Bernard Ullathorne (1806-89), as Bishop of Birmingham (1850-88) and thus Newman's Ordinary, figured prominently in the *Rambler* affair, as well as in many other aspects of Newman's life (cf. C. Butler, *The Life and Times of Bishop Ullathorne* [London, 1926], 1, 307-29; V. McClelland, *New Catholic Encyclopedia* 14, 377-8).

⁴¹ C. Dessain, *Newman*, 113, and *Coulson*, 13.

⁴² Gillow (1814-77) went to Ushaw College as a student and remained there as a professor for the rest of his life; he was known for denouncing views that he considered dangerous to Church teaching (cf. *L&D* 19 [1969] 586).

⁴³ *L&D* 19, 129-30, 134-7, 144-6, and a later exchange, 204-7; references in other Newman letters: 149, 159-60, 185, 213.

furnished the raw material for his article *On Consulting the Faithful* that was published in the July, 1859, issue of the *Rambler*;⁴⁴ "his publication of this essay was an act of political suicide from which his career within the Church was never fully to recover."⁴⁵

Even before this article appeared, Newman had already yielded to his bishop's request to give up the *Rambler* editorship. Much more damaging to Newman's reputation, however, were the misrepresentations of his views at Rome; in fact, passages from the *Rambler* article were translated "in such a way as to give an heretical sense to the meaning of the words."⁴⁶ Moreover, Rome's request for an explanation, sent through intermediaries, inexplicably never reached Newman, who was thus left under a cloud of suspicion that was not entirely dissipated until his elevation to the cardinalate nearly two decades later.⁴⁷

The Meaning of "Consulting"

A casual reader browsing through *Consulting the Faithful* might get the superficial impression that the argument is a Victorian quibble over the divergence between "consult" in colloquial English usage and its Latin theological equivalent. Theological differences, however, really went much deeper; opposing methodologies were at odds: Newman, viewing the

⁴⁴ Coulson, 53-106; an edited version was re-printed in 1871 as an appendix to the third edition of *The Arians of the Fourth Century*, 445-468; cf. Coulson, 109-116.

⁴⁵ Coulson, 2.

⁴⁶ V. Blehl, *Newman's Delation, Some Hitherto Unpublished Letters*, in *Dublin Review* 234 (1960-61) 298.

⁴⁷ V. Blehl, *ibid.*, 296-305, published the letters of Bishop Brown of Newport and Menevia who delated Newman, and later in *Newman, the Bishops and THE RAMBLER*, in *Downside Review* 90 (1972) 20-40, published additional correspondence between Ullathorne, Wiseman, and Propaganda that indicates the personal views of some of those involved with Newman's delation.

role of the laity historically, wrote from an *a posteriori* perspective; his critics, considering the question abstractly, reacted on *a priori* principles.⁴⁸

In addition, a variety of other ecclesiastical issues troubled the waters. One source of tension was Newman's coldness towards exaggerated Italian devotions, but even more annoying to his critics was Newman's continued display of affection not only for his friends who had remained Anglican, but also for the church and university he had left. Understandably, some Roman Catholics harbored a lingering suspicion of the Tractarian converts, particularly of those whose zest for theological discussion contrasted sharply with the ghetto-mentality of many born-Catholics. But most obvious of all was the attitude of clerical hauteur epitomized in the remark of Monsignor Talbot: "What is the province of the laity? To hunt, to shoot, to entertain. These matters they understand, but to meddle with ecclesiastical matters they have no right at all. . . ."⁴⁹ In marked contrast, to the question—"who are the laity?"—was Newman's riposte: "the Church would look foolish without them."⁵⁰

Given this variety of issues, as well as the personality-conflicts among the opponents, *Consulting the Faithful* may be characterized as a theological brief that pleads simultaneously at a number of different levels by using arguments of different types aimed at convincing the reader of the merit of the author's position. As a result, the treatise is not only fascinatingly heuristic, it can be read in a number of ways. If *Consulting the Faithful* is most obviously a theological statement on the role of the laity in the Church, it can also be read as a Marian document insofar as the pivotal remark that occasioned its publica-

⁴⁸ V. Blehl, *Dublin Review* 234 (1960-61) 302.

⁴⁹ Coulson, 41. George Talbot (1816-86), a convert who was once refused admission to Newman's Oratory, became a papal chamberlain and intermediary of the English hierarchy at Rome (cf. *L&D* 11, 357).

⁵⁰ C. Dessain, *Newman*, 117.

tion links *sensus fidelium* with the definition of the Immaculate Conception: "In the preparation of a dogmatic definition, the faithful are consulted, as lately in the instance of the Immaculate Conception."⁵¹

Newman opened his case by defending the appropriateness of claiming that the faithful are consulted in defining doctrines; his defense is variously rhetorical, historical, and theological. For example, rhetorical overtones are evident in two historical examples Newman cited. First, St. Athanasius is cited as eluding the pursuit of imperial officers by responding with an *equivocatio*—pointedly contrasted with "equivocation"—so that a reader may be tempted to infer that the impertinent questions of relentless pursuers deserve similar treatment.⁵² In addition, there is a lesson to be learned from St. Dionysius of Alexandria, who was unjustifiably delated to Rome for denying Christ's divinity: "if even a saint's words are not always precise enough to allow of being made a dogmatic text, much less are those of any modern periodical." Newman then appealed to his readers' fair-mindedness: a lack of "perfect accuracy of expression" should not be gratuitously attributed to "self-will and undutifulness in the writers."⁵³

Presumably, of course, Newman's rhetoric was designed to persuade readers of his theological "view."⁵⁴ At first sight, however, his explanation of "consult" may strike some as prosaic:

It includes the idea of inquiring into a matter of *fact*, as well as asking a judgment. Thus we talk of "consulting our barometer" about the weather:—the barometer only attests the *fact* of the

⁵¹ *Coulson*, 53.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 59-60.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 62.

⁵⁴ For Newman, the term 'view' refers to "that synthetic, personal grasp of concrete reality which was his educational and intellectual ideal" (N. Lash, *Newman on Development*, p. 35); taking a "view" is then not simply a matter of reason and logic.

state of the atmosphere. In like manner, we may consult a watch or a sun-dial about the time of day. A physician consults the pulse of his patient; but not in the same sense in which his patient consults *him*.⁵⁵

This description offers a tidy parallel: just as the physician consults the pulse to make a diagnosis, so the official Church teachers consult the laity in the preparation of a dogmatic definition. The parallel is quite persuasive, provided, of course, that one assumes the presence of such a lay "pulse."

The existence of the *sensus fidelium* is apparently broached only indirectly through a question about its rationale: why must the laity be consulted? Newman replied: "because the body of the faithful is one of the witnesses to the fact of the tradition of revealed doctrine, and because their *consensus* through Christendom is the voice of the Infallible Church."⁵⁶ Admittedly, it is reassuring to envision apostolic tradition, originally committed to the whole Church, being handed down from age to age, and being manifested "variously at various times." In such an organic view, the laity constitutes one channel of tradition and as such must be respected, even though the prerogative of defining rests with the *Ecclesia docens*. Nonetheless, while Newman's vision of *consensus* is quite attractive, the critical question, the existence of such a *consensus*, is apparently assumed.

SENSUS FIDELIUM: *A Writ of Right*

Given the defensive posture that Newman was forced to take in the *Rambler* affair, it is hardly surprising that there is no hint of the Anglican antecedents of his position. Rather, his accustomed "great stress" on the *consensus fidelium* was credited to the then leading Roman theologians, Perrone⁵⁷ and

⁵⁵ Coulson, 54.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 63.

⁵⁷ Giovanni Perrone (1794-1876) was for most of his life a professor at

Passaglia,⁵⁸ to Pius IX, and to Ullathorne, Newman's Ordinary.

The data advanced from Roman theological teaching indicated that in the process of preparing for a doctrinal definition, it occasionally happens that the evidence from the usual sources (such as bishops, doctors, and theologians) is deficient; in such instances, appeal may be made to "the *sensus* and *consensus fidelium*, as a compensation for whatever deficiency there might be of patristical testimony in behalf of various points of the Catholic dogma."⁵⁹

Such an appeal, however, seems to be a case of "not simply an appeal to the 'facts,' but rather to those facts as seen in the light of the interpretive hypothesis which seems most satisfactorily and economically, to account for them."⁶⁰ Thus, methodologically, the *sensus fidelium* appears to be "an hypothesis to account for a difficulty,"⁶¹ and so, those of an objectivistic mentality might well be expected to discard the *sensus fidelium* as purely hypothetical. From an hermeneutical standpoint, of course, the issue is not whether it is allowable to make an hypothesis, but rather the legitimacy of the particular hypothesis one chooses.⁶² In any case, acknowledging that any such foun-

the Collegio Romano; Newman, in order to obviate Roman Catholic criticism of the *Essay on Development*, prepared a summary of its main features for Perrone (cf. T. Lynch, *The Newman-Perrone Paper on Development*, in *Gregorianum* 16 [1935] 402-47; in *Consulting*, Newman mentioned reading Perrone's *De immaculato Beatae Mariae conceptu* (1847) "with great interest" (Coulson, 63); on Perrone, cf. C. Testore, *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 11, 146.

⁵⁸ Carlo Passaglia (1812-87) was a professor at the Collegio Romano (1844-58) whose political views brought him into conflict with the papal government; in 1861, he fled Rome for Turin where he was a teacher, editor, and member of parliament; on Passaglia, cf. H. Schauf, *New Catholic Encyclopedia* 10, 1051-2.

⁵⁹ Coulson, 64.

⁶⁰ N. Lash, *Newman on Development*, 22-23; Lash's judgment on the *Essay on Development* seems applicable to *Consulting*.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 17-9.

⁶² Cf. R. Jenson, *The Knowledge of Things Hoped For* (New York, 1969) 220; "The historian brings a projected conception of history as a

dational hypothesis is inherently debatable implies that the best defense is rhetoric—which was in fact a prominent tactic Newman used in *Consulting the Faithful*.

Admittedly, Newman's vision of the *sensus fidelium*, if not certainly convincing, is engaging. Accordingly, the Gospel is seen as being continually traditioned within the Church in such a way as to be recognized through various *indicia* or *instrumenta traditionis*, which "vary one with another in the evidence they give in favor of particular doctrines; so that the strength of one makes up in a particular case for the deficiency of another, and the strength of the 'sensus communis fidelium' can make up (e.g.) for the silence of the Fathers."⁶³

The role of the *sensus fidelium* appears even more attractive if it is envisioned in the quasi-Platonic view of Newman's *Essay on Development*, where the traditioning of the Gospel is portrayed as the process of the living idea of Christianity through history.⁶⁴ In this process, one aspect of the idea may be more in evidence at one time than at another; correspondingly, one historical period may focus on one aspect in preference to another. Correspondingly, the *sensus fidelium* is an aspect of the Christian Idea as concretely realized in a specific time and place; simultaneously, any specific realization of the Idea is potentially an instrument whereby others might perceive some aspect of the Gospel. The *sensus fidelium*, then, is an aspect distinct, but not radically separate, from other aspects, such as the teaching

whole to the texts; the documentary evidence speaks for or against this conception and precisely in so doing is historically cognized. Thus the historian's preconception of history as a whole makes specific research possible; and specific research verifies, modifies, or disqualifies the historian's preconception."

⁶³ Coulson, 66.

⁶⁴ Briefly, in Newman's usage, an *idea* is "the potentially or actually apprehended representative of the whole object;" an *aspect* of an idea is "any partial knowledge of the idea (and so of the object) from a particular point of view;" the *development* of an idea is the process "by which the aspects of an idea are brought into consistency and form" (cf. N. Lash, *Newman on Development*, 50-51)

of pastors.⁶⁵ Accordingly, it could happen that the tradition, on which a definition is based, is "manifested in the *consensus fidelium* with a luminousness which the succession of Bishops," does not furnish; or it could happen that a definition is made because of the *fideles*, who would no longer brook any delay.⁶⁶

However congenial this vision of Christianity as an Idea progressing through history may be, critically speaking, it also must be recognized as "an hypothesis to account for a difficulty."

As his second witness, Newman recalled the history of the proclamation of the Immaculate Conception. In 1849, Pius IX's encyclical, *Ubi Primum*, requested information from the world's bishops about the state of devotion to the Immaculate Conception in their dioceses.⁶⁷ Next, "when it came to the point to take measures for the definition of the doctrine, he did lay a special stress on this particular preliminary, viz. the ascertainment of the feeling of the faithful both towards the doctrine and its definition." Finally, *Ineffabilis Deus*, the bull of definition, indicated that the Pope had wanted to know beforehand the devotion of the laity towards the doctrine,⁶⁸ and included

⁶⁵ Coulson, 66.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 70.

⁶⁷ In 1846, the Sixth Provincial Council of Baltimore had chosen Mary under the title of Immaculate Conception as patroness of the United States. In response to *Ubi Primum*, the Seventh Provincial Council of Baltimore in 1849 testified that there was great devotion to Mary's Immaculate Conception among priests and laity in the United States and expressly favored the definition of this doctrine at an opportune time; cf. J. Hennessey, *A Prelude to Vatican I: American Bishops and the Definition of the Immaculate Conception*, in *Theological Studies* 25 (1964) 409-12.

⁶⁸ In November, 1854, immediately before the promulgation scheduled for December 8th, episcopal representatives discussed the draft of the bull at four meetings; at least some of the bishops felt that the definition's text should express their *consent*; this issue was to re-surface fifteen years later at Vatican I. In the discussions, Bishop Grant of Southwark raised the question whether the text of *Ineffabilis Deus* countenanced Newman's views on development; Passaglia, a consultor at the meetings, replied that the bull adopted no system and agreed that there was no growth in the

among the various witnesses to the apostolicity of the doctrine, the "singularis catholicorum Antistitum ac *fidelium* conspiratio;" by implication, "the two, the Church teaching and the Church taught, are put together, as one twofold testimony, illustrating each other and never to be divided."⁶⁹

As the third witness for justifying emphasis on the *sensus fidelium*, Newman strategically cited Ullathorne's treatise on *The Immaculate Conception of the Mother of God*:⁷⁰ "Nor should the universal conviction of pious Catholics be passed over, as of small account in the general argument; for that pious belief, and the devotion which springs from it, are the faithful reflection of the pastoral teaching." Moreover, following Augustine and Jerome, Ullathorne also wrote that "the common accord of the faithful has weight much as an argument even with the most learned divines." Finally, Ullathorne indicated a more basic reason why *consensus* can be regarded as a testimony to dogma:

The more devout the faithful grew, the more devoted they showed themselves towards this mystery. And it is the devout who have the surest instinct in discerning the mysteries of which the Holy Spirit breathes the grace through the Church, and who, with as sure a tact, reject what is alien from her teaching.

doctrine itself but an increased clarification in its understanding and formulation (cf. J. Hennessey, *Theological Studies* 25 [1964] 412-9); in addition, Perrone was an advisor for both *Ubi Primum* and *Ineffabilis Deus* (cf. M. O'Carroll, in *Downside Review* 89 [1971] 61).

⁶⁹ Coulson, 70-1, for quotations in this paragraph.

⁷⁰ According to C. Butler (*The Life and Times of Bishop Ullathorne* I, 178), Ullathorne's "exposition" on the Immaculate Conception was published in London in January, 1855 (and subsequently in Baltimore); thus, Newman is inaccurate in saying that "a year or two passed [after the 1854 definition] and the Bishop of Birmingham published his treatise on the doctrine" (Coulson, 71); in his *Letter to Pusey*, Newman described Ullathorne's treatise as "a work full of instruction and of the first authority" (*Diff.* 2, 127).

⁷¹ Coulson, 72, for quotations in this paragraph.

Summarizing his findings, Newman found that *consensus* was regarded by theologians in various ways:

... 1. as a testimony to the fact of the apostolical dogma; 2. as a sort of instinct, or *phronēma*, deep in the bosom of the mystical body of Christ; 3. as a direction of the Holy Ghost; 4. as an answer to its prayer; 5. as a jealousy of error, which it at once feels as a scandal.⁷²

Historical and Experiential Evidence

Newman also cited as evidence the history of the early Church, an area of study where he was an expert with few peers; he pointed out that "while the fourth century is the age of doctors... nevertheless in that very day the divine tradition committed to the infallible Church was proclaimed and maintained far more by the faithful than by the Episcopate."⁷³ If Newman was willing to qualify his position in various ways, still he found "in the Arian history a palmary example of a state of the Church, during which, in order to know the tradition of the Apostles, we must have recourse to the faithful."⁷⁴ For the history of Arianism indicates that "there was a temporary suspense of the functions of the 'Ecclesia docens';" in effect, "the body of Bishops failed in their confession of faith."⁷⁵

⁷² Coulson, 73.

⁷³ *Ibid.*; Newman included a list of twenty-one historical examples verifying the faithful resistance of the laity to Arian enticements (pp. 86-101)

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 76.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 77; a list of twenty-two historical examples effectively demonstrated the lack of episcopal leadership during the Arian controversy (pp. 72-86); Newman's terminology in this passage became an issue; in the revised version of *Consoling*, Newman pointed out that the failure of bishops and local councils to defend the truth, or at least not to make compromising statements, constituted a "suspense" (not a "suspension") of the *Ecclesia docens*; secondly, in saying that the "body" of bishops had been unfaithful, Newman was using "body" in its sense of a "great part,"

Accordingly, the Arian controversy, which involved "the very foundation of the Christian system," and continued over a period of six decades, is offered by Newman as a "striking" instance corroborating "Father Perrone's statement, that the voice of tradition may in certain cases express itself, not by Councils, nor Fathers, nor Bishops, but the '*communis fidelium sensus*.'"⁷⁶

If, as some might object, the *sensus fidelium* is an important as Newman has suggested, why has it received so little attention? Just as a person may not realize what his position on a particular question is until he is asked and finds in replying that he does have a definite view, similarly, "the consent of the faithful is one of those theological presuppositions of Catholic doctrine which become clear only when required for use."⁷⁷ Newman suggested that this may have been the experience of Perrone, who did not give the *consensus fidelium* a distinct place among the *loci theologici* in one of his works of 1842, although a few years later the *consensus fidelium* assumed a pivotal place in his work on the Immaculate Conception.⁷⁸

Even if 'the "consensus fidelium" has, in the minds of many, fallen into the background,' Newman insisted that an ecclesiological balance must be maintained "... each constituent portion of the Church has its proper function, and no portion can safely be neglected." Thus, the history of Arianism reveals an important theological principle: "Though the laity be but the reflection or echo of the clergy in matters of faith, yet there is something in the "*pastorum et fidelium conspiratio*," which is not in the pastors alone.' This principle was operative not only in the early church but in the then recent definition

not in the technical latin sense of *corpus* (episcoporum); cf Coulson, 115-7; *The Arians of the Fourth Century* (Westminster, Maryland, 1968) 464-8.

⁷⁷ Coulson, 24.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 102-3.

of the Immaculate Conception: "Pope Pius has given us a pattern, in his manner of defining, of the duty of considering the sentiments of the laity upon a point of tradition, in spite of whatever fullness of evidence that Bishops had already thrown upon it."⁷⁹

In addition to these ecclesiological implications, the *consensus fidelium* also looms large "in the case of doctrines which bear directly upon devotional sentiments." Since "the faithful people have ever a special function in regard to those doctrinal truths which relate to the Objects of worship," it was more than appropriate that the laity was consulted prior to the definition of the Immaculate Conception: "And the Blessed Virgin is preëminently an object of devotion; and therefore it is, I repeat, that though Bishops had already spoken in favor of her absolute sinlessness, the Pope was not content without knowing the feelings of the faithful."⁸⁰

The definition of the Immaculate Conception, however, was not a unique case. A similar, albeit more demonstrative, involvement of the laity in doctrinal matters occurred at the council of Ephesus, whose history gave Fr. Bernard Dalgairns occasion to remark: "While devotion in the shape of a dogma issues from the high places of the Church, in the shape of devotion . . . it starts from below . . ."⁸¹ Newman, acknowledging his substantial agreement with Dalgairns, concluded his essay:

... the *Ecclesia docens* is more happy when she has such enthusiastic partisans about her as are here represented [at the council of

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 103-4, for quotations in this paragraph.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 104-5, for quotations in this paragraph.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 105; John Dobree (Bernard) Dalgairns (1818-76), a disciple of Newman during the Oxford Movement, later as an Oratorian became involved in the dispute between the Birmingham and London Oratories and a few years before the publication of *Consoling* had left the former for the latter where he eventually became superior (cf. M. Trevor, *Newman's Journey*, 168-82; H. Rope, *New Catholic Encyclopedia* 4, 617-8).

Ephesus,] than when she cuts off the faithful from the study of her divine doctrines and the sympathy of her divine contemplations, and requires from them a *fides implicita* in her word, which in the educated classes will terminate in indifference, and in the poorer in superstition.⁸²

Summary Reflections

In *Consulting the Faithful*, as on other occasions, it was a challenge that evoked from Newman an expression of his convictions on *sensus fidelium* and Mariology. In graphic terms, *sensus fidelium* can be described as a chain linking together a series of historical facts; the facts available are joined as evidence for the remaining links which are not immediately in sight but purportedly exist. Or in a more theoretical vein, *sensus fidelium* apparently is an over-arching hypothesis that has been extrapolated on the basis of selected incidents in Church history and then used to justify particular doctrinal developments. In this respect, the promulgation of the Immaculate Conception is doubly important, first, as a definition whose verification rests, at least partially, on the *sensus fidelium*, and, simultaneously, as a confirmation that the modern role of the laity exemplifies the laity's role in patristic times. Accordingly, the double parallel—laity both in patristic and in modern times, *Theotokos* and Immaculate Conception—is not only a matter of ecclesiological balance but also an indication of ecclesial identity: the Church of the present is the Church of the Fathers, and vice versa. And an added advantage is that *sensus fidelium* fits well with Newman's view of Christian history as the development of an idea: if the Gospel is envisioned as an idea channeled, yet developing, from apostolic times to the present, *sensus fidelium* is sometimes a forceful current in the flow of the Church's history, while at other times, apparently a tranquil backwater.

Newman, at the time he wrote *Consulting the Faithful*, had

⁸² Coulson, 106.

no difficulty in accepting either the Immaculate Conception or the *sensus fidelium*. In contrast, if his Roman Catholic contemporaries firmly accepted the Immaculate Conception, many of them balked at his views on the laity's position in the Church. A reverse, but similar, situation seems to exist presently, when some of our own contemporaries display an increased appreciation of the ecclesial role of the laity, yet unfortunately seem to have lost their devotion to Mary. It would be convenient to conclude by suggesting that what was lacking in Newman's day, and is lacking in our own as well, is a theological sensitivity to both the *sensus fidelium* and Mariology. One might then complacently suggest the need to recapture Newman's view of the mystery of the Church. Yet, convenience and complacency aside, it is all too obvious that very few of either Newman's or our own contemporaries could acquire anything like his patristic knowledge or any more than a glimpse of his view of Christianity. What may not be so evident, however, are some critical, though concealed, faults in Newman's presentation.

From a critical viewpoint, the most problematic aspect of the *sensus fidelium* is its existence, insofar as arguments in its favor seem to be circular. A number of historical incidents are interpreted as projecting its existence, which, once presumed, is in turn used to explain these historical incidents. Perhaps this hermeneutical circle is inescapable; nonetheless, it might be more helpful to approach *sensus fidelium* through a functional analysis of the tradition-process. Secondly, and somewhat similarly, *sensus fidelium* is seemingly most intelligible when viewed as an aspect of an homogeneous theory of development. Conventional appraisals of Newman's *Essay on Development* to the contrary, it is at least debatable whether Newman personally advocated an "homogeneous" theory.⁸⁸ More funda-

⁸⁸ Newman's so-called theory of development is really more tentative and problematic than is usually acknowledged; cf. N. Lash, *Newman on Development*, 36: "...when a theologian today offers a 'theory of doc-

mentally, it is questionable whether a platonic explanation of development really meets the requirements of modern historiographical critique.⁸⁴

To what extent Newman was personally conscious of these deficiencies is a matter of conjecture; at least, his skillful use of rhetoric in *Consulting the Faithful* makes any weaknesses in his argument less than apparent. Indeed, Newman's case is still very convincing a century later; yet if his arguments are still attractive, their range of effectiveness seems somewhat diminished. It is doubtful whether this judgment would have disturbed Newman, who, presumably, would have considered it only a "call" prompting a new and stronger response. *Faute de mieux*, that task needs to be met by theologians today.

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trinal development,' we have come to expect from him a systematic and unified interpretation of doctrinal history. Those who read the *Essay* with such an expectation are puzzled and disappointed. ...The *Essay* undoubtedly contains, in rudimentary form, the seeds of a number of such theories, the systematic elaboration of which might show that they are not mutually compatible."

⁸⁴ The very fact that doctrinal development has recently received considerable discussion suggests that an "homogeneous interpretation" is not quite so satisfactory as it was once thought to be.