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OBSERVATIONS ON FR. FORD'S LECTURE

First of all, I should like to express my gratitude to Father Ford and also my congratulations for the very excellent treatment of a very difficult question.

In the text Father Ford invites us to more work—there is a job to be done which is the clarification of the meaning of the *sensus fidelium* and its presentation so that "the educated may not become indifferent and the uneducated superstitious."

That the *sensus fidelium* is a *regula fidei*, a norm of belief, is a traditional doctrine of the Church with roots in Sacred Scripture. Personally, I do not find this problematical. In recent years Pope Pius XII consulted the *sensus fidelium* before the definition of the Assumption as did Pope Pius IX before tradition on the notion of the *sensus fidelium*, and its use in the Church as a norm of belief, today it does seem to have become a problem.

Father Ford approvingly quotes William Thompson who wrote in an article *The Sensus Fidelium And Infallibility* in the September 1973 issue of *The American Ecclesiastical Review*: "Moving into the thought of Newman can be a refreshing experience."

Reading Newman on the subject can be a "refreshing experience" because Newman attempted to show the force of the *sensus fidelium* in history. It seems clear, too, that Newman's teaching of the *sensus fidelium* was closely intertwined with his idea of the Church as Mystery.

Nevertheless, we have to recognize that Newman may inadvertently be part of the problem. In the first place, *On Consulting the Laity* became mixed up in a polemic on the relationship of the laity to the hierarchy. Then, too, the contrast which Newman had presented between the laity and the body

of bishops in Arian controversy was slightly overdrawn. The bishops were part of the *fideles*; at least some very important bishops were.

Newman connected the *sensus fidelium* explicitly to the development of Marian Doctrines. Moreover, his notion of the *sensus fidelium* proceeded from a deeply intuitive and mystical sense of the Church as Mystery. For a deeper and very much needed awareness of the Church as the body of believers we should enter into the effort to clarify and emphasize this doctrine.

Father Ford exhorts us to a greater effort to understand this doctrine, and obviously a necessary part of this effort will be a return to Newman. Dimensions of the question include the nature of the assent of faith, the concept of development and the image of the Church. All of these were key questions for Newman himself. Further, the *sensus fidelium* could profitably be studied in connection with the medieval *sensus fidei*. Moreover, if we begin to study the doctrine of the *sensus fidelium* by asking the wrong questions or setting up the wrong *status quaestionis* we will only find interminable arguments with no possibility of solution.

I would like to ask Father Ford whether he would agree that any inquiry into the *sensus fidelium* should begin with the notion of the Church as Mystery. This seems to be implied in his concluding remarks. I wonder, Father, whether you could expand on this subject?

REV. ALBAN A. MAGUIRE, O.F.M.