

SHAUN PROSSER

COLLECTIVE THEOLOGICAL DISCERNMENT: CARDINAL NEWMAN'S REFLECTIONS ON SENSUS FIDELIUM

Cardinal John Henry Newman was notably receptive to the role of the laity within the *sensus fidelium*, recognising their contribution in the discernment and authentication of doctrine. His accommodating nature rankled certain Catholic quarters, but he never strayed from official Church teaching on the topic. Newman's openness to lay opinion was part of his broader vision of the Church as a dynamic, living body, where the faithful's sense of faith could help shape and refine understanding under the guidance of the Magisterium. This article explores the influences and articulations of Newman regarding the formulation and maintenance of doctrine.

*'Pray up, pay up and shut up!'*¹ This was the brusque appraisal of the role of the laity by the English Monsignor, George Talbot, who, in 1859 had found some seemingly congenial assertions by the then Catholic priest, John Henry Newman difficult to digest. Talbot was apoplectic at the notion that the laity, as suggested by Newman in a passing defence of the role of lay people in helping to shape episcopal thinking, should

¹ Michael Sharkey, 'Newman On The Laity', *Gregorianum*, Vol. 68, No 1/2 (1987) 339-346.

somehow be *consulted* by the Holy See when honing dogma or when considering devotional matters that the laity may have unique insight into.

This public spat had its genesis in the late 19th Century, when a royal commission had been established to explore the bettering of primary education within the United Kingdom, which would involve participation of Church-run schools, lay governors, and, of course, ecclesial authorities. The Catholic Bishops of England flatly refused to engage in such a process citing distrust of ‘surveillance by non-Catholics.’² Their blatant rebuttal was framed as a ‘sectarian refusal’³ by a Catholic school inspector, Richard Simpson, who wrote a hearty response to their refusal in the 1859 January edition of the lay-led Catholic periodical, *The Rambler*.

The ‘substantial financial assistance’⁴ that Catholic schools received was cited by Simpson as reason enough why the Catholic hierarchy should be involved in such collaborative work with government education departments. That such a public challenge could be made to the Catholic hierarchy of the United Kingdom caused outrage amongst many. The Tablet framed such an objection as openly ‘encouraging disobedience to the bishops.’⁵

In Oxford, John Henry Newman – ever the considered peacemaker – had stated in a note in *The Rambler*, in defence of the original article, that *surely* the bishops, ‘must really desire to know the opinion of the laity on subjects in which the laity are especially concerned?’⁶ Newman then referenced the faithful having been ‘*consulted*,’⁷ by the see of Rome in the recent promulgation process of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception. Monsignor Talbot – a chamberlain to Pius IX – decried such

² John Ford, ‘Newman on *Sensus Fidelium* and Mariology’, *Marian Studies*, Vol. 28, Article 12 (1977) 120 – 145.

³ Fáinche Ryan, ‘On Consulting the Faithful in Matters of Doctrine: From Newman to the Second Vatican Council’, *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*, Vol. 106, No 423, 340-358.

⁴ Ryan, ‘On Consulting the Faithful...’, 340.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*, 344.

⁷ Sharkey, ‘Newman On The Laity’, 341.

thinking and warned that the Catholics of England should be contained, lest they become, 'the rulers of the Catholic Church instead of the Holy See and the episcopate.'⁸

Challenges to Newman's accommodating words shuttled throughout Catholic England with a public accusation of 'heresy'⁹ being flung by the dogmatic theologian, Dr John Gillow, of the great Northern seminary, Ushaw. The weight of objection channelled towards the Bishop of Birmingham, William Ullathorne on the issue, eventually became too burdensome to ignore and the bishop visited Newman and gently advised him to terminate his editorship of *The Rambler*, in which Newman's suggestions of lay appreciation had been circulated. A loyal Newman conceded to the request but did not relinquish his firm views on the importance of lay involvement in oiling the wheels of God's church on Earth and felt a fuller defence of his position was necessary.

The kindly Newman was noted for the 'intensely personal character'¹⁰ of his writing and he proposed his 'pioneering understanding'¹¹ of doctrine in *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*.

Through several works on doctrine, Newman unpacks and puts weight behind the essentiality of the lay encounter with God in the life of the Church, he also provides explanation as to the semantics around his controversially received use of the word *consult*.

Newman publicly surveyed his thinking on doctrine and development during his closing sermons at the University of Oxford. He starts one of his closing Oxford sermons, in January 1843, with a focus on the mother of Christ, unpacking his reasoning around lay perceptions of revelation. Mary is admired by Newman for her strong faith when presented with her mission in Luke 1:38. Newman expounds that, 'Mary's faith did not end in a mere acquiescence in Divine providences and revelations: as

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Charles Stephen Dessain, 'Cardinal Newman on the Laity', *Life of the Spirit*, Vol.16, No.182 (1961) 58.

¹⁰ Ian Ker, *The Achievement of John Henry Newman* (Glasgow: Harper Collins Religious, 1991), 1.

¹¹ Ian Ker, ed, *The Cambridge Companion to John Henry Newman* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 120.

the text informs us, she ‘pondered’ them.’¹² Mary’s interactive theology impresses Newman who positions her as an approved precedent for receiving revelation. He says:

Thus St. Mary is our pattern of Faith, both in the reception and in the study of Divine Truth. She does not think it enough to accept, she dwells upon it; not enough to possess, she uses it; not enough to assent, she develops it; not enough to submit the Reason, she reasons upon it.¹³

Newman sees Mary’s reaction to the delivery of Divine Truth as that of both the lay person, in that the theologically unlearned receives and prayerfully considers what is presented, and that of the theologically educated Church doctors, who, due to their inquiring nature, must, ‘investigate...weigh, and define.’¹⁴ Mary is innately equipped through a particular favour to interpret correctly what she has received, but the Church also instructs that Mary is of ‘the race of Adam,’¹⁵ thus referencing her humanness and so, like Mary, all people have an elemental means to decipher authenticity. The gestation and handling of revealed truths by the laity is illustrated by Newman in his essay on the development of doctrine. Newman stresses that the longevity of Christianity matters and justifies serious consideration and that to follow Christ cannot simply be brushed aside as mere opinion or hobby – Christianity stands as a stark ‘fact in the world’s history.’¹⁶ The ‘public property’¹⁷ that Christianity is, was, for Newman, a solid foundation for theological discourse. Newman notes that, ‘it’s [Christianity] home is in the world and to know what

¹² John Henry Newman, ‘*Sermon 15: The Theory of Developments in Religious Doctrine*’ (lecture, University of Oxford, 1843).

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium*, November 21, 1964, Paragraph 53.

¹⁶ John Henry Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* (Basil Montague Pickering, 1878) chap. 1, <https://archive.org/details/a599872600newmuoft/page/n5/mode/2up?view=theater>

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

it is, we must seek it in the world and hear the world's witness of it.¹⁸ Just as Mary laid witness to the scheme entrusted to her, so too must the world witness to Christianity and its message. By rooting Christianity in the depth of history, Newman seeks to acknowledge the *gravitas* time can give to a subject. The truth of a matter can be observed through the prism of time in broad, yet solid, strokes. Newman acknowledges that history fashions humanity with 'lessons rather than rules'¹⁹ but, despite the fact these lessons can be 'dim [and]...incomplete,'²⁰ they are assuredly certain. It is in ancient origins that *true* Christianity is anchored for Newman, and he repines that Protestantism is guilty of, 'dispensing with historical Christianity altogether, and [has formed] ...a Christianity from the Bible alone.'²¹ There is an implication from Newman that fundamental beliefs which reside in the annals of time, held within 'the secret life of millions of faithful,'²² can be trusted as authentic without necessarily being codified formally by the Church, as the adherence to them with fidelity automatically reflects their established truths.

The power of tradition for Newman has its origin in the preaching of the apostles, who lived outside of a biblical framework and whose teachings would be simply heard and felt by generations of early Christians, and, in turn, passed on without serious distortion. When discussing the movement of doctrine, Newman asserts that any developments, 'are found where they might be expected, in the authoritative seats and homes of the old tradition, the Latin and Greek churches.'²³ Newman extends the custodianship of tradition beyond the episcopal seats to the *home* where the faithful live and whose witness of faith gains value through cultivation over time. This witness for Newman is serious and is not simply a positive reaction by the faithful to the faith but is a collective

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, chap. 2.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, chap. 5.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, chap. 6.

²¹ *Ibid.*, chap. 5.

²² Kerr, *The Cambridge Companion*, 119.

²³ *Ibid.*, 124.

affirmation whose, ‘consensus through Christendom is the voice of the Infallible Church.’²⁴

Newman states:

...the tradition of the apostles, committed to the whole Church in its various constitutes and functions per *modum unius*, manifests itself variously at various times: sometimes by the mouth of the episcopacy, sometimes by the doctors, sometimes by the people, sometimes by the liturgies, rites, ceremonies and customs... It follows that none of these channels of tradition may be treated with disrespect; granting at the same time fully, that the gift of discerning, discriminating, defining, promulgating, and enforcing any portion of that tradition resides solely in the *Ecclesia docens*.²⁵

Newman sees that under the watchful mastery of the Church, doctrine moves unincumbered within the world and through every member of the Church and is tested and approved by the faithful in their lived experiences. Father Charles Stephen Dessain, from the Birmingham Oratory, notes Newman, in the first volume of his historical sketches, sees that the faithful are motivated by a ‘living spirit’²⁶ that is ‘transmitted so faithfully’²⁷ through an internal awareness (*sensus fidei*) alongside the vivid truths of the faith as spoken from the tradition of the Apostles onwards, and through successive Church leaders. Although, as Newman says, there may be ‘inconsistencies and alterations’²⁸ of doctrine and worship throughout the ages, ‘they are not sufficient to interfere with the general character and course of the religion.’²⁹

For Newman, the core tenets of Christian belief, rooted in the apostles, nurtured by the Church Fathers and consented to by the faithful, is

²⁴ Sharkey, *Newman On the Laity*, 341.

²⁵ Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, § 2.

²⁶ Dessain, *Cardinal Newman On The Laity*, 52.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Newman, *Sermon 15*, Para. 7.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

evidence enough of authenticity. Vincent of Lérins' (d. c 434) maxim, *quod semper, quod ubique, quod ab omnibus* is pointed to by Newman as a concise summation of how doctrine is held in its essence through everyone, over time. The vanguard against error throughout time has been, for Vincent, the *universality* of the Church and he advises the Church, when faced with disruptive reinterpretations of doctrine to, 'cleave to antiquity'³⁰ for clarity. It is to the past that Newman looks, when forming his dense work, *On Consulting the Faithful in Matters of Doctrine*.

Newman illuminates a large portion of this work with examples from the Arian controversies, when the faithful, faced with a well-crafted deviation of the faith they had known, rejected and repelled teachers who sought to impose their malformed understanding of the Christian essentials.

Newman begins *On Consulting...* with the reasons for writing it. He recognizes his use of the term '*consulted*' when talking of the lay faithful and their input into the dogmatising of the Immaculate Conception had caused upset amongst many in the Catholic world. Newman feels that semantics have tripped up the reader in understanding his intentions when writing. He says that a formal, technical, and even scientific understanding of the word *consult* within a Latin context means to 'consult with' or 'take council',³¹ but he then explains, 'the English word 'consult,' in its popular and ordinary use, is not so precise and narrow in its meaning; it is doubtless a word expressive of trust and deference, but not of submission.'³² The action of consultation is one that does not necessarily involve eliciting ideas or permissions but can simply be an observational exercise which reveals a wider insight into something. Newman gives an example, saying that a pulse is consulted by a doctor to ascertain a fact, but this is different from the way a patient consults a doctor where the patient is seeking definition. In his words in

³⁰ Vincent of Lérins, *Commonitorium*, chap. 4.

³¹ Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, § 1.

³² *Ibid.*

The Rambler, Newman has stated that he presumed the bishops would *want* to approach the laity when considering dogmatics.

It seems that Newman sees that the interaction of the Magisterium with the faithful on the defining of the Immaculate Conception would be informative – not through the assessing of lay opinion but through lay actions, as the faithful themselves in their devotions to the Blessed Virgin would indicate the ‘state of health’³³ of the proposed doctrine, positioning such an indication within the context of historic consent. The faithful, alongside the *ecclesia docens*, have maintained a vibrant devotion to the immaculate reality of the Virgin Mary which Newman indicates is of intrinsic value.

Newman echoes the ‘unanimous opinion’³⁴ that the formula of the Immaculate Conception is rooted in the ‘primitive doctrine that Mary is the second Eve,’³⁵ indicating the positive nature of Mary who points outwards to Christ, rather than Eve who was directed by the serpent inwards on herself. Newman considers that Eve was imbued with an indwelling of grace, that was gifted by God and was fractured by disobedience, so he encourages the notion that it is logical to view Mary, who was also illuminated with grace, as being of eminent dignity – or sinlessness – due to her active fidelity when faced with God’s intentions for her. The Apostolic Constitution of Pius IX that defined the dogma of the Immaculate Conception makes many references to the fact that the anchoring of the belief of Mary’s sinless conception and subsequent veneration was both, ‘ancient and widespread.’³⁶ Over time the devotions around Mary’s sinlessness grew, and the constitution lauds the activity of the Church preceding Pius IX, whom it states:

...approved confraternities, congregations and religious communities founded in honour of the Immaculate Conception, monasteries, hospitals, alters or churches; they praised persons

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Pope Pius XI, *Defining The Dogma of the Immaculate Conception* (Liverpool: St. Paul Books and Media, n.d.).

³⁵ Ford, *Newman On Sensus Fidelium and Mariology*, 125.

³⁶ Pius IX, *Defining The Dogma Of The Immaculate Conception*, 8.

who vowed to uphold with all their ability the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception of the Mother of God.³⁷

The document cites that the precept of the Immaculate Conception, ‘always existed in the Church as a doctrine that has been received by our ancestors and that has been stamped with the character of revealed doctrine,’³⁸ but that this doctrine had yet to be formally articulated. Within the Apostolic Constitution, the paragraph, *The Mind of the Bishops* explains the processes the Church undertook prior to defining the doctrine. In the first instance, the push for a chartered acknowledgment of the Immaculate Conception was promoted by petitions from bishops throughout the world, and these requests were supplemented, at the order of the Holy See, by reports from the bishops as to the ‘piety and devotions’³⁹ of the faithful, in relation to Mary’s immaculate identity. The bishops replied with an overwhelmingly positive ‘zeal’⁴⁰ which the enquirers of the Vatican were seemingly thrilled with. Newman viewed the testament of the faithful in such processes of doctrinal development as being of particular importance as they echo the apostolic origins, ‘on which alone any doctrine whatsoever can be defined.’⁴¹

Just as with the liturgy of the Church, the practices of the faithful are a *witness* to the ‘antiquity and universality which they contain, and about which they are ‘consulted.’⁴²

Newman expresses frustration when reviewing ‘defined’⁴³ doctrine in the Church that there are some occasions where sources for such definitions are lacking apostolic or patristic heritage, and Newman observes the witness of the faithful as playing a part in addressing these gaps. This was a point Newman discussed in Rome with the renowned

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 6.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 12.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, § 1.

⁴² Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, § 1.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, § 2.

Jesuit, Giovanni Perrone whose mastery of dogmatics made him a sought-after academic for the clergy and committees of Rome for over half a century. Newman discussed with Perrone the seeming holes in the foundational writings of some official Church doctrine and Perrone was apt, 'to lay great stress on what he considered to be *sensus* and *consensus fidelium*, as a compensation of whatever deficiency there might be in the patristical testimony in [sic] behalf of various points of the Catholic dogma.'⁴⁴ Newman uses elements of Perrone's epic work, *Prælectiones Theologicæ* to furnish his thinking. Perrone points to the Spanish scholar, Gregory of Valencia (d.1603) who held that the faithful, in their quantity, and guided by reason, can define the faith, as far as is possible, and that with the assistance of the Holy Spirit they can preserve doctrine with confidence through divine revelation.⁴⁵ Perrone proposes that the consensus of the people of faith – along with the testimonies of religious bodies, places of study and theologians – acts as a seal of authenticity.⁴⁶ Any such authentication made by the *sensus fidelium* works alongside the 'continual and living mastery'⁴⁷ of the Church. The Church, for Perrone, is ever-monitoring and lives dogmatic truths without doctrine necessarily being scribed into existence. Living dogma cannot be separated from doctrine; one reinforces the other and both are enshrined within the solemn promises

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ Newman, *Consulting*, § 2: '*Quod quidem Gregorius de Valentia tam fidei consensu plenius evoluit. Nam in fidei definitionibus, inquit, ratio, quantum fieri potest, habenda est fidelium consensus. Hic rursus „spectet” est actus observantiae et observantiae. Pergit tamen Gregorius: „Quoniam et ipsi, quatenus ex illis est Ecclesia, ita a Spiritu Sancto adiuvante, divinas revelationes integre ac pure conservant, ne omnes quidem errare possunt.” .. Hoc tantum argumentor: si cum de quaque re in religione controversia est. omnium fidelium consensum esse oportet quod plerumque constat, sive ex usu cuiusdam cultus in communi inter Christianos populos, sive ex scandalo et communi delicto, quod ex aliquibus oritur.*'

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*: '*Hæc demum omnia firmissimo veluti sigillo obsignat totius christiani populi.*'

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*: '*Juge et vivum magisterium.*'

of Christ.⁴⁸ Newman gives an example from Perrone in his essay on doctrinal development with regards the doctrine of the *visio beatifica*.

Newman acknowledges that this dogma – the seeing of God post-purgatory, pre-final judgement – had a turbulent public history, and that although it had its root in tradition, it was not formally prioritised with many bishops appearing indifferent to its public necessity. Perrone says that the faithful, in the face of this opposition, were held in place by ‘*divina tradition*,⁴⁹ which acted with a ‘luminousness’⁵⁰ that enlightened the processes of the Church to actively formulate the dogma of the *visio beatifica*. Newman goes further and suggests that the ‘*fideles* would bear delay no longer,’⁵¹ and that a sanctioning of the dogma of the *visio beatifica* had become a necessity. There is a reiteration from Newman regarding the faithful on the *visio beatifica* that ‘their opinion and advice indeed was not asked, but their testimony was taken, feelings consulted, their impatience...feared.’⁵²

Both Perrone and Newman present a picture, with regards the development of the *visio beatifica*, that the *fideles* compensated where the bishops were lacking and the use of the word ‘feared’ by Newman could be seen to somewhat elevate the role of the *fideles* in that they appear to have asserted themselves to such a degree that the bishops were forced to pause and respond to their requests. Such an instance could be amplified to be seen as the faithful momentarily leading, or at least informing, the bishops. Perrone sees the intricacies of the *consensus fidelium* as compensatory for, ‘whatever deficiency there might be of patristic testimony,’⁵³ around ‘various points’⁵⁴ of Catholic doctrine,

⁴⁸ Giovanni Perrone, *Praelectiones Theologicae* (Turin: Maietti, 1842) 209 (p. 303). ‘*Contingit traditio dogmatica identificari cum doctrina ipsius Ecclesiae, a qua separari non potest; Quocirca, etiamsi documenta omnia defecissent, sola haec viva et erudita doctrina sufficeret ad cognoscendam divinitus doctrinam traditam, praesertim circa solemnia Christi promissiones.*’

⁴⁹ Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, § 2.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ Sharkey, *Newman On the Laity*, 341.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

suggesting the lay faithful may sometimes be better placed to highlight aspects of doctrine which may not be lived out fully within the lives of the episcopate. Pope Pius IX's bull on the Immaculate Conception is generous in emphasising a positive union of episcopate and laity with regards input into defining that particular dogma, something Newman takes time to study in his doctoral development essay, referring to the *antistitium ac fidelium conspiratio*, that 'the Church teaching and the Church taught, are put together, as one twofold ministry, illustrating each other and never...divided.'⁵⁵

This encouraging clarification from the bull of Pius IX is clearly enjoyed by Newman who characterises this sentiment as situating the faithful as a mirror, 'in which the bishops see themselves.'⁵⁶ Newman perceptively extends this metaphor to consider that such a mirror reflects an angle of oneself that can be known in no other way.

The bulk of Newman's essay on doctrinal development presents instances in which an engaged laity move to repel a defective spiritual doctrine presented by the proponents of Arianism. Newman had studied in detail the works of the Church Fathers and his 1833 book, *The Arians Of The Fourth Century*, explored how Arius and his followers managed to penetrate so effectively throughout the Latin and Greek worlds. The book also examines how the defective theology of the movement was challenged by both bishops and lay people. On many occasions, it was a well-rounded and sound laity who alone challenged Arianism when it infiltrated their region.

The Reverend Michael Sharkey sees that the laity of the Nicene period were well equipped to deflect theological distortions. The two central reasons he gives for their assertiveness are: '1. [that] they were well catechised, and 2. they were faithful to their baptismal promises.'⁵⁷ Sharkey concludes that those well taught in the faith cherish it more readily and feel compelled to defend it. Sharkey takes his lead from Newman who, in his writing on the current position of Catholics in

⁵⁵ Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, § 2.

⁵⁶ Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, § 2.5.

⁵⁷ Sharkey, *Newman On the Laity*, 344.

England in 1851, says, he wants a laity 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 want an intelligent, well-instructed laity...’.⁵⁸ Newman’s study of the Arian controversies, pre-Perrone, would give him insight into a noticeable demarcation between the *ecclesia docens* and the *ecclesia discens*, or he would note that the symbiosis of the two, ‘was not as clear-cut as contemporary standards wished to establish.’⁵⁹

Despite some distance between the laity and episcopate in certain episodes in antiquity, Newman does lay out the positive theological precedent for how the hierarchy has historically worked with the faithful and whose presence and practices have impressed on the traditions of the Church. Quoting the thinking of several significant writers, Newman concludes that the faithful discern authenticity of tradition in five ways. These are:

1. Fidelity to apostolic dogma.
2. Having an instinct or *phrónēma*⁶⁰ within the mystical body of Christ.
3. Promotion in fidelity through the Holy Spirit.
4. In prayer.
5. In understanding the scandal of error.⁶¹

The thinking Newman uses to inform his thesis includes that of the Tübingen scholastic, Johann Möhler from his work, *Symbolik* (1832). Möhler, like Gregory of Valencia, understood that deep within each person is an innate pull towards God which leads to truth. Möhler calls this, ‘an instinct’⁶² and an ‘eminently Christian tact, which leads him [the faithful] to all true doctrine.’⁶³ For Möhler, the faithful’s response to God goes much deeper than mere adherence; the faithful have woven into them an indwelling of understanding, granted by the Holy Spirit, that births an awareness of the truths of the Church, the same truths on which the Church was founded; the two cannot be separated.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ Ryan, *On Consulting the Faithful...*, 345.

⁶⁰ *φρόνημα*, (*phrónēma*), meaning ‘the thoughts and purposes of the mind.’

⁶¹ Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, § 3.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *Ibid.*

The English cardinal John Fisher (d.1535) and Saint Augustine (d.430) are also cited by Newman to help unpack further his 5-point schema. Fisher understands that before any council-sanctioned decree there must be a subtle coming together of clergy and people within a *taciti* understanding – an agreement granted at baptism that, ‘awakens faith.’⁶⁴ The responses of the faithful to tradition is seen by Fisher as having the shape of ‘imperceptibility,’⁶⁵ implying it is an intramural or *lived* fidelity on behalf of the faithful, rather than an explicitly articulated one.

Subtlety is also a motif brought up by Saint Augustine, and covered by the French Jesuit, Dionysius Petavius (d.1652), whom Newman quotes in his work. Petavius sees Augustine explaining that revelations made by God to the faithful are not always of grand execution. God can reveal things through, ‘usual ways’,⁶⁶ and that ‘what is unknown to them [the faithful], is open to them in answer to their prayer.’⁶⁷ Petavius suggests that it was through this process, of attentive discernment, that the faithful were enlightened as to the sinlessness of Mary.

In his humility, Newman could be cast as a simple torch bearer for well-established theologies, with regards the skill of discernment, and was simply following on from the Fathers of the Church and also key Church thinkers from the recent past. Newman highlights, through citing previous theologies, the contained nature of historic discernment on the part of the laity – in that it appears to be something understood without being openly trumpeted, which interestingly contrasts with Newman’s very public dissection of the subject over several works.

Erroneous theology, for Newman, corrupts the body of the faithful, and Newman understood that just as any foreign object entering a body causes a disruptive shift in equilibrium, so too are the faithful able to ascertain what causes disharmony in their spiritual lives. The faithful remain, ‘irritated and disordered’⁶⁸ until falsehood is expelled. Although

⁶⁴ Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2nd ed. (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana 1997) § 684.

⁶⁵ John Henry Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, § 3.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, § 3.4.

⁶⁷ John Henry Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, § 3.5.

⁶⁸ Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, § 3.

the faithful, and indeed the entire Church, have an inbuilt perception of truth, Newman does question how rounded such a reception of truth can be. Patrick Manning explores this theme with reference to Newman, quoting a principle of disproportion laid out by another Newman scholar, Edward Jeremy Miller. Professor Manning explains:

Newman suggests that the mind can conceive of an idea, but because of the limitations of human knowing, one can only ‘know’ an idea in parts...if a number of people were to share the image that comes to mind when the word ‘*Jesus*’ is put forth, those images could well be varied, but all would claim some validity or truth....conversely to the extent we do not consult the various images, ideas, insights and experiences of others, to that extent we are further from ‘the whole’.⁶⁹

Although the faithful may lack a theological completeness in their perceptions, Manning suggests this should not be discounted as the Church would be unable to view the fullness of the Christian experience without their varied input which in its eclectic proportions propose a central reality.

Manning also says that to disregard the input of the faithful is neglectful of the Holy Spirit and the ‘fullness of truth’⁷⁰ it emits. Manning picks up Newman’s use of the Greek word, *phronema* which he sees as raising the discussion around consultation of the faithful beyond that of mere business talk to a theological level. Deliberation, within a theological context, is a ‘holy business’⁷¹ for Manning, and one that – fuelled by baptism – goes to the heart of the human person. The importance of Newman’s use of the word *phronema* is further explored by Manning who explains:

⁶⁹ Patrick Manning, ‘Why Consult The Laity: A Theological Justification’, *The Furrow*, Vol. 69, No 4 (2018): 195-205, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44738715>.

⁷⁰ Patrick Manning, ‘Why Consult The Laity: A Theological Justification’, *The Furrow*, Vol. 69, No 4 (2018): 195-205, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44738715>.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

...in [it's] most basic sense, [it] refers to the 'diaphragm', which of course, is the muscle that, for the ancients, determined the nature and strength of one's breath. Thus, for them it was the source for and determined the strength of the human spirit and emotions.⁷²

The application by Newman of the word, *phronema* could be Newman purposefully presenting the *sensus fidelium* as a vital pulse, or constant flow and although this flow may not have the theological depth of the Magisterium, it is still essential for the overall function and maintenance of the Church. Newman's essay on development includes a tone of chastisement towards the episcopate and popes of the 4th Century as he illustrates a lack of support for bishops who adhered to Nicene beliefs. Newman says that, 'the divine dogma of the Lord's divinity was proclaimed, enforced, maintained and (humanly speaking) preserved, far more by the '*ecclesis docta*', or those skilfully schooled, than by those who had done the teaching, or '*ecclesia docens*...'.⁷³ That having been said, Newman does namecheck the devout bishops who at various points stood firm in opposition to the Arian interlopers but he notes that over the years the popes, episcopal authorities and patriarchies were lapse in support of these leaders and it was a collective of the faithful who stood in support of Athanasius, Eusebius and Hilary as they earnestly preached against falsehood.

The latter part of Newman's essay on the development of Christian doctrine recites examples in which the faithful shooed away or challenged Arianism. These numerous accounts are min-biographies of councils and events which paint a catastrophic picture of how Arianism infected Christendom and how Church infighting led to disunity amongst the various episcopal sees. The Council of Sardica (347) is noted by Newman as an example of how fractious the Church was at the time and that Athanasius, loyal to traditional Church teaching on the dual nature of Christ, was an object of dissent and his presence at the Council was

⁷² Manning, 'Why Consult The Laity: A Theological Justification', 195-205.

⁷³ Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, § 3.5.

rejected by many bishops with Arian sympathies. These arguments resulted in a fragmented council, held in two separate camps, which exposed the depth of division within the Church at the time.

Newman calls this period of indifference to Arianism by the papacy ‘imperial heresy’⁷⁴ and it is from this standpoint that Newman concludes his essay with ‘proofs’⁷⁵ of the laity – along with bishops and religious – leading the rebuttal of Arianism. In Alexandria, Newman reports of an incident where the faithful left the confines of the Church to pray outdoors to avoid the Arian bishop, George, whom they ‘refused communion with.’⁷⁶ Saint Anthony is reported to have left the desert to warn the inhabitants of Egypt of preachers ‘opposing the truth.’⁷⁷ In Antioch, the Bishop Leontis, perverted with Arian thinking, hid his proclivities ‘for fear of the multitude,’⁷⁸ while monks in Cappadocia, along with a sizable amount of the faithful rejected Arian sympathisers and set up worship independent of their bishop.

The Arian emperor, Valens nearly decimated the population of Edessa after they refuted Arians concepts. It was only the revulsion at having to kill so many inhabitants that saved the city from the Emperor’s wrath. Newman sees that the Arian assault in Nicopolis brought ‘new glory instead of evil,’ as the clergy and faithful were given the chance to whole heartily reject Eustathius’ new theologies. Saint Basil reports that in Asia Minor the laity ‘who are of sound faith avoid the [Arian] places of worship as schools of impiety,’⁷⁹ due to the corruption of local church elders. The disgust of the faithful who opposed Arian belief culminated in people refusing to bathe in the same public baths used by Pope Liberius, who had shamefully conceded to Constantius’ Arian designs.

⁷⁴ Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, § 3:11.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, § 3.5.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

The accounts put forward by Newman do not present a deeply theological response from the public with regards how their faith is being threatened.

There does not appear to be complex meetings or prolonged exegesis, but a simple, doable response, that of physically moving away and closing oneself off from corrupt teaching or physically closing the door on those who want to preach heresy.

It would appear that a stability in personal faith can give enough confidence to the laity to challenge wayward bishops and preachers. There is a ‘curious phenomenon’⁸⁰ for Newman with regards the actions of the faithful in these instances, in that:

...in the philosophy of the human mind...we often don’t know whether we hold a point or not, though we hold it; but when our attention is once drawn to it, then forthwith we find it so much part of ourselves, that we cannot recollect when we began to hold it, and we conclude (in truth), and we declare, that it has always been our belief.⁸¹

Newman sees this placid consideration of spiritual output as somewhat lost in the age he is writing. A perceived over-adherence to Rome at the expense of the input of the lay-faithful is problematic for him and he sees this as the reason for the indifference from pastoral sources towards the *consensus fidelium*. Again, he rebukes, unusually sharply, against ‘theological sophistry’⁸² and hankers for more consideration of the lay experience.

Ultimately, Newman does not disregard the unique and distinct roles of the Magisterium and the laity; he understands that to be most effective the two must work together in roles befitting their mission within the mystery of the Church. He was not shy in being positioned alongside the laity in what he saw as a shared space, that of theological

⁸⁰ Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, § 3.5.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² *Ibid.*, § 3.II.

discernment. Through an interconnected but defined discernment, Newman saw that both clerical and lay factions of the Church would be – as history has proved – more effective in realising and promoting the Gospel.

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