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THE THEOLOGY AND REALITY OF THE LAITY IN NEWMAN

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FOREWORD

It may come as a surprise that of all the studies that have been done on Newman, relatively few have focused on his ideas about the laity. Those studies which do discuss this theme usually limit their treatment to the sensus fidelium. Moreover, they tend merely to comment on the subject instead of treating it in a systematic way.

In order to do justice to the subject of Newman and the laity, it seems necessary first of all to take into account all of Newman's works, including his letters, and not to limit our field to his famous article On Consulting the Faithful in Matters of Doctrine. We will also want to consider some works of systematic theology, which are not usually used in this type of study, but which are necessary to situate Newman's thought in the appropriate theological framework.

Newman has often been hailed as a precursor of Vatican II, but this popular opinion has usually not been adequately explained and has today become almost a conventional way of speaking. One of the motives for the present work is to clarify such opinions and to show in what sense they are true in the case of the laity.

Our study presupposes some knowledge of the basic concepts of ecclesiology, which it was neither possible nor appropriate to include in the space of this investigation. We have also assumed that the reader is already reasonably familiar with Newman's life.

The present work is divided into two main parts. The first is a kind of extensive introduction which lays out the fundamental historical and theological concepts that give an insight into the genesis of Newman's ideas about the laity while an Anglican.

The second part discusses Newman's idea of the essence of the laity and is drawn principally from his sermons and letters. It studies, for example, the laity as part of the Church and of the world, the common priesthood of the faithful, the sensus fidelium and the Christian freedom of the laity.

After reading this study we think the reader will reach the conclusion that Newman's concept of the laity is really quite rich and full of theological content, and can serve as a valuable help for our understanding of the laity today.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to thank Prof. José Morales, whose constant guidance and encouragement have helped make this work possible.
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ABBREVIATIONS

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Apo Apologia pro Vita Sua, ed. M. J. Svaglic, 1967
Ari. The Arians of the Fourth Century
DA Discussions and Arguments on Various Subjects
Diff. I, II Certain Difficulties felt by Anglicans in Catholic Teaching, 2 vol.
Ess. I, II Essays Critical and Historical, 2 vol.
HS I, II, III Historical Sketches, 3 vols.
LD The Letters and Diaries of John Henry Newman, ed. Charles Stephen Dessain
LG Loss and Gain: the Story of a Convert
OS Sermons Preached on Various Occasions
Prepos. Lectures on the Present Position of Catholics in England
Ps I-VIII Parochial and Plain Sermons, 8 vol.
SD Sermons bearing on Subjects of the Day
US Newman's University Sermons: Fifteen Sermons preached before the University of Oxford
Tracts I-VI Tracts for the Times, 6 vol.
VM I, II The Via Media of the Anglican Church 2 vol.
I. THE FOUNDATIONS OF A DOCTRINE ON THE LAITY

1. The clergy and the laity in Tractarian ecclesiology

The view of the Church clearly presented by Newman since 1828 and by the Tractarians in general a few years later was basically a hierarchical one. Neither in teaching nor in practice did the Oxford Movement and its proponents devote special attention to the lay element, nor did they look much to the laity for help in carrying out their undertakings of renewal.

Besides, the theology of the Movement insisted on the administration of the sacred as a strictly ministerial office; in fact, this was one of the characteristics which distinguished the Movement from non-conformist religious groups. These groups, more or less alien to the Anglican Church, had suffered a growing and devastating invasion of principles hostile to the Gospel in matters of doctrine, ritual and organization. Such groups were for Newman a clear example of what the Anglican Church should neither imitate nor tolerate.

In effect, one can reasonably argue that in the Oxford Movement, promoted by clerics of the High Church and aimed initially at the clergy, the role of the laity was almost irrelevant. In the preparatory meetings of the Oxford Movement in July 1833, Hugh Rose's suggestion—that a lay synod be called as a support and a possible springboard for the nascent religious party—was turned down. The Tractarians thought that questions concerning the rights and functions of laymen in the Church were better suited to other religious groups such as the Methodists or Independents, who rejected the ordained ministry and defended a non-institutional, non-hierarchical concept of the Church. «The Independents represent the rights of the laity,» wrote Newman in 1847.

1. LG, 82.
This explains by contrast not only the relatively low rank of the lay element among the Tractarians, but also the distrust and frequent scorn with which they looked upon societies and associations promoted by laymen with the purpose of spiritual renewal or civic improvement. In 1838, Pusey, describing the religious fashion of the day, complained of «societies taking the initiative for every purpose under the sun... and the ultimate end of these societies is to obtain acts of Parliament»; «societies are our Episcopacy and newspapers our rules of faith».

In keeping with their views and religious instincts on this matter, and looking to promote an internal renovation of the Anglican Church, the Tractarians never showed particular interest in lay initiatives aimed at drawing Christians into the management of public affairs.

The law of reciprocity, which frequently prevails in such attitudes, explains why the Oxford Movement and its leaders were ridiculed and often censured by lay groups of the Established Church. Newman refers to this in his first lecture of Difficulties of Anglicans in 1850, considering in retrospect the characteristics of the Movement of 1833 and the setting in which it developed: «Confident, indeed, and with reason, of the truth of its great principles, having a perception and certainty of its main tenets..., hated and blackened by its opponents».

An examination of Newman’s writing after 1839, especially his Parochial and Plain Sermons, reveals nonetheless abundant material for formulating a definite doctrine on the Christian layman, his character and his duties in the Church and in the world. This finding should not surprise us if we take into account Newman’s profound understanding of the Church and the broadness of his religious outlook. The truth is that the ideas of Newman the Catholic about the laity were not altogether new. They were anticipated in important ways and at times with unusual detail by Newman the Anglican in the 1830s.

2. The defense of the hierarchical ministry

One of the aims of the Protestant Reform was to teach the laity a new sense of personal responsibility before God. This manner of thinking, which is reflected in their denial of the visible Church as intermediary in the name of Christ, opened the way to a fuller participation by the laity in the liturgy through the introduction of the vernacular and hymns. The Reform also put the Bible entirely in the hands of the layman, as it were; the layman had that direct access to the Word of God which the subjectivist principles of private judgment called for.

The different denominations which arose from the Reform of the sixteenth century delegated to the layman various tasks and levels of authority. The Church of England, whose break with Rome began in 1534 under Henry VIII and was completed under Elizabeth I in the religious settlement of 1559, took a rather conservative stance on this point, admitting a ministerial consecration or ordination with a certain sacramental character.

In spite of the conciliatory ambiguity of the twenty third Article of Religion, which establishes that it is «not lawful for any man to take upon him the office of public preaching, or ministering the Sacraments in the Congregation, before he be lawfully called...», the thirty-sixth Article prescribes that «the Book of Consecration of Archbishops and Bishops, and Ordering of Priests and Deacons, lately set forth in the time of Edward the Sixth... doth contain all things necessary to such Consecration and Ordering: neither hath it any thing, that of itself is superstitious and ungodly».

Anglicans, then, differ substantially on this point from the other Protestant churches. For Luther and Zwingli the Church is hardly more than the earthly city transferred to the Gospel and waiting for the kingdom of God. The Church is a people, not an institution. And in Her they consider only the final reality of salvation worked out in each of the faithful by a sovereign act of God. But those means of salvation which give rise to the institution of the Church, mother of the faithful, do not enter

4. The Articles of Religion were promulgated in 1571.
5. Of Consecration of Bishops and Ministers.
into consideration. In such a system, the laity are elevated indirectly—at the cost of the hierarchical element, which is, in effect, lost.

Calvinistic Presbyterianism granted the laity a large measure of responsibility in the management of the spiritual affairs of communities, in the supervision of public morality, education and social work. Most of all, the laity enjoyed the same rights as ministers in such matters as speaking and voting in doctrinal discussions in presbyteral meetings, synods and general assemblies. The Baptists went so far as to entrust the laity with the administration of sacraments.

The majority of these groups admit that the common priesthood of the faithful does not eliminate the special character of a group of faithful specially devoted to the priestly offices, but at the same time they maintain that this difference is merely one of function, not of essence.

Such was not the belief, however, of Newman and the Tractarians. Going by a Catholic interpretation of the Articles of Religion, they always maintained that the Church was an unequal society composed of two groups—laymen and clerics—, the latter clearly distinguishable by having received priestly orders. The distinction between the two was thus not only functional, but essential and constituent.

Curiously, it was a lay Tractarian, John W. Bowden, who spelled out this doctrine in Tract 5 (Oct. 1833): «A layman (is one who) has never received the ordination of a clergyman» 6. Newman, commenting on «the rulers and the subjects of the Church», points out that «the Church is visible because (it consists) of clergy and laity» 7.

In another Tract of 1833, W. Palmer and Newman explain in greater detail that «the Clergy have a commission from God Almighty through regular succession from the Apostles to preach the Gospel, administer the Sacraments, and guide the Church; and, again, that in consequence the people are bound

7. PS III, 220, 222.
to hear them with attention, receive the Sacrament from their hands, and pay them all dutiful obedience» 8.

Underlying these observations was the concept of the Church as a body of men, bound by the same laws, acting together, speaking the same thing, attending the same worship, reverencing the same pastors and Teachers, and receiving at their hands the Sacraments which Christ has ordained 9. The basis of this unity was the sacrament of baptism, of which Newman had a traditional idea, as we observe in a letter to a friend: «When [Baptism] is considered as admission into the Church, then at once the Christian is viewed as one of a body—but when as admission into a Covenant, this is consistent with the independence of the soul of every thing here below, rite, minister, body, teaching, etc. and readily leads to the independent, Calvinistic, private judgment, liberty of conscience, voluntary system, which... is now in fashion» 10.

Bowden is careful to specify in the aforementioned Tract 5 that, as «simple members of Christ’s Church», laymen do not possess the power to baptize nor to administer the sacrament of the Body and Blood of Our Lord 11. In contrast to the tradition and discipline of Rome, which in case of necessity permits baptism by a layman and even by a non-Catholic, the Anglican Book of Common Prayer does not consider this possibility. Baptisms performed in homes, which were allowed only in extraordinary cases, had to be administered by the «Minister of the Parish or, in his absence, any other lawful minister than can be procured».

Newman thought the matter of baptism administered by layman a delicate one: «as to the question of Lay and Dissenting Baptism it is a difficult one» 12; but pointed out that «lay baptism under certain restrictions has ever been admitted in the Church» 13. «In the case of Lay Baptism» he writes to Hugh Rose, «the bishop’s implied permission has been considered

8. Tracts I, n° 15, 1.
10. LD VI, 274.
12. LD VI, 127.
necessary, as everyone knows» 14. He states as his reason for arguing thus that «all Christians are in one sense priests» and «this particular gift attaches to them all that they may propagate Christianity» 15.

In any case, the opinion of the Tractarians and Newman himself on the possibility of entrusting sacred function to laymen was evidently very restrictive. Such functions called for a special consecration which authorized ministers to exercise their rights and responsibilities in the Church: «As vacancies occurred among the angels of the Churches... the existing members of the sacred band consecrated new individuals to the participation of their privileges, candidates for the office being presented to them by the laity for their approval or fit and proper persons being selected by themselves» 16.

In some cases, then, it may correspond to laymen to present candidates for priestly orders, but their ordinary and principal duty was to respect and obey their ministers. Tract 5, written by the layman John Bowden, ends with the following considerations: «The duties which our knowledge of these things, Brethren of the Laity, makes incumbent upon us, are... Filial love and affectionate reverence towards the collective Church, and towards those, her Pastors and Masters, who are set in spiritual authority over us; a zeal for the inculcation of her pure doctrine and the extension of her fold; a determination in evil report and in good report to stand by her» 17.

That a layman be entrusted with any important task in Church matters would likely be seen by the Tractarians as an abuse and usurpation. Referring to the ecclesiastical commission appointed by the government in 1834 to propose reforms to the Anglican Church, Newman writes to Rose: «so infamous a commission in which the laity exceed the clergy» 18.

The Tractarian emphasis on the doctrine of apostolic succession and, consequently, on priestly ordination reinforced the status of the clergy by reminding the world that their authority did not derive from any secular power, but rather from a divine

15. Ibid., 26.
16. Tracts 1, no 5, 9.
17. Ibid., 15.
18. LD VI, 4.
mandate and boasted a divine character, coming from Christ Himself. As a minister ordained to teach and to administer the mysteries of the Church, and as an intermediary between laymen and God, the presbyter now recovered something of the reverence and sacred power which he had in great part lost during the two preceding centuries.

With the sense of mystery now restored to religion, greater stress was placed on worship than on religious instruction. As a result of this restoration, the layman saw himself practically excluded from the participation in the liturgy which the Reform had proposed. The liturgy was for Newman and the men of the Oxford Movement a responsibility of the clergy.

The importance of the presbyter was evident in the new and recently restored churches in which the presbytery physically separated the clergy from the laity. The office of lay lector would not be established in the Church of England until 1866.

Newman urged the clergy insistently to exercise their rights and responsibilities in the Church. Otherwise, they could leave important posts unattended which others might unlawfully assume. «The office of ecclesiastical authorities», he writes in 1840, «is to lead and guide to their rightful issues the great movements of the human mind, which are ever characterized by passion and error, but ever based on some portion of the truth. If these guides will not act, others will act for them. So it was in the case before us: the rulers of the Church did not understand her mission, and Lady Huntington became acting bishop instead of them» 19.

The laity must go to the Apostles, and not to the teachers and oracles of the present world, for the knowledge of their duty, as individuals and as members of the Christian Church 20. But the Church’s ministers for their part must be willing to teach Her doctrine with authority.

Newman minces no words in saying that the cause of much of the division in the Church can be traced to his fellow ministers' reticence and inability to work out differences among themselves:

«One chief cause of sects among us is, that the Church’s voice is not heard clearly and forcibly; she does not exercise her own right of interpreting Scripture, she does not arbitrate, decide, condemn; she does not answer the call which human nature makes upon her. That all her members would in that case perfectly agree with each other, or with herself, I am far from supposing; but they would differ chiefly in such matters as would not forfeit their membership, nor lead them to protest against the received doctrine. If, even as it is, the great body of Dissenters from the Church remained during the last centuries more or less constant to the Creeds except in the article which was compromised in their Dissent, surely much more fully and firmly would her members then abide in the fundamentals of faith, though Scripture was ever so freely put into their hands. We see it so at this day. For on which side is the most lack at this moment? in the laity in believing? or the Church in teaching? Are not the laity everywhere willing to treat their pastors with becoming respect; nay so to follow their guidance as to take up their particular views, according as they may be of a Catholic of private character, in this or that place? Is there any doubt at all that the laity would think alike, if the Clergy did? and is there any doubt that the Clergy would think alike, as far as the formal expression of their faith went, if they had their views cleared by a theological education, and moulded on a knowledge of Antiquity? We have no need to grudge our people the religious use of Private Judgment; we need not distrust their affection, but we have to blame our own waverings and differences» 21.

Newman expresses the same concern some five years later in a letter to a friend: «You have just hit the point. The laity say, Whom are we to believe? It is a most distressing state of things for those who wish to be quiet and dutiful. This is common sense and irresistible —and will be felt more and more» 22.

At the same time, the Tracts advise the layman that, far from criticizing the shortcomings of the clergy, he has a duty to pray for them, taking into account what St. Paul says in I Thes 5, 25, Phil 1, 19 and II Cor 1, 11. Alfred Menzies comments

21. VM I, 141.
22. Packet, 55.
that «these texts show clearly, that it is the Christian’s duty to pray at all times for the Ministers of the Gospel».

3. Laymen and their role in the Church of England

The historical accounts of Anglicanism tell us little of laymen and their role in the Church of England. Laymen are expected to attend religious services regularly and to receive the sacrament of Communion. In keeping with Article XXX of Religion («The Cup of the Lord is not be denied to the Laypeople...»), Newman criticizes the «Romanists, refusing the Cup to the Laity».

Some laymen were given jobs in the administrative affairs of the congregation.

Till now, no one has even attempted to investigate the religious life of the lay Tractarians. We hope in the present study to suggest some avenues of investigation on this topic and to fill some of the many existing lagunas.

We know that lay Evangelicals acted as a dynamic force within the Anglican Church during the 1820s and 30s. John Keble expressed the conviction of thousands of Anglican clerics and laymen in his famous sermon The National Apostasy, generously considered by Newman as the formal beginning of the Oxford Movement. At the end of his sermon, Keble makes a strong appeal to laymen to protect the rights of the Church: «Among laymen, a deep responsibility would appear to rest on those particularly whose profession leads them most directly to consider the boundaries of the various rights and duties which fill the space of civilized society.

«The immediate machinery of change must always pass through their hands; and they have also very great power in forming and modifying public opinion. The very solemnity of this day may remind them, even more than others of the close amity which must ever subsist between equal justice and true religion».

23. Tracts I, no 14, 2.
24. LD VI, 263.
The same spirit of confidence in the initiatives of all generous Christians —clerics and laymen alike— undertaken for the benefit of the Church abounds in the writings of Newman during this period. «The hope of the Church does not lie with Newspaper readers. It lies with thoughtful men, and young men —whether lay or clerical. These are the men who must have weight, and these are the men whom Newspapers do not, for the most part, affect. And they will in their sphere and place spread the truth against the Newspaper» 27.

The Edinburgh Review, a laicist periodical hostile to all that the Oxford Movement represented in the way of genuine religious renewal, recognized while it lamented the wide influence wielded by Newman and the Tractarians on laymen and clerics. It is also worth noting that the review shied away from disqualifying the leaders of the Movement as being antiquated or quixotic in their thinking. «They are men of our own times... wielding an influence whose centre is perhaps to be placed in our universities, but whose circumference is wide enough to enclose the remotest corners of the land» 28.

Of course, Newman saw the main impulse of the Movement being generated and carried out by clerics like himself. The British Critic, a publication controlled by Newman since 1838, did not hide its conviction that the Church directed by the clergy, «the great agents under God of beneficial changes,» was capable of defending itself 29.

But the laity too had an indispensable mission to fulfill, which was besides part of their Christian vocation and decisive for the good health of the Church. «You can serve the Church as a layman,» writes Newman to his loyal friend Henry Wilberforce. «Come up here and employ yourself. You may be useful theologically and parochially in a hundred ways —and take so much of direct religious employment as your conscience allows you, but do not say you must be idle...» 30.

Newman felt proud of the spiritual vibration of John Bowden, whom he had met and become a very close friend of at Oxford in 1818. It was to Bowden that he dedicated his second

27. Packet, 44.
28. Vol. LXIII, 1836, 44.
30. LD III, 106.
volumen of *Parochial and Plain Sermons* with the following words: «To/ John William Bowden, Esq. / in the cheerful con­viction / that the English Church amid many defections / still holds her influence/ over an attached and zealous laity / this volume is inscribed / by his affectionate friend, JHN.» In 1840 he would dedicate the fifth volume to another enterprising Anglican layman, Joshua Watson, who nevertheless did not figure in the Oxford Movement 31.

Newman counted on lay influence not only to extend within the Church the benefits of true religion, but also to impart them to society. «Another, in a higher class of society, has a certain influence in parish matters, in the application of charities, the appointment of officers, and the like,» he says in a sermon of 1835; «he, too, must act, as in God’s sight, for the Truth’s sake, as Christ would have him» 32. He was gladdened by the appointment of true Christian laymen to government committees entrusted with ecclesiastical affairs: «On the Committee of 12 Laymen for the Curate’s Fund are placed the names of Gladstone, Acland, Bowden, and Wood —this is good» 33. He consid­ered lay groups effective representatives of public opinion and a valuable lever for exerting legitimate political pressure whenever it was necessary to defend the Church and her spiritual interests: «You had better let friends know, to be in readiness. The movement (a petition) should proceed from the country not from us» 34. Newman also predicted that some day the laity instead of the state would have to maintain the clergy, in order to insure the Church’s freedom: «I am sure each clergyman should (be a charge on) his own people —but the early Church was a voluntary one, so far as the laity as a body supporting the clergy as a body» 35.

In spite of this, Newman doubted that lay effort alone was sufficient to carry out the pastoral reform necessary for the Church of England. In a important writing of 1836 which contains ideas of Hurrell Froude, he expresses this doubt quite clearly and at the same time suggests measures which are surprising to hear from a

31. For more information on Watson and the Oxford Movement, see Charles Smith’s article *J. Watson: 1771-1855*, in *Theology* 58 (1955), 167-73.
32. *PS* III, 212.
33. *LD* VI, 194.
non-Catholic Englishman: «I scarcely expect that anything will be devised of a nature to meet the peculiar evils existing in a densely peopled city. Benevolent persons hope, by increasing our instruments of usefulness, to relieve them. Doubtless they may so relieve them; and no Christian effort can fail of a blessing. New churches and lay cooperation will do something; but, I confess, I think that some instrument different in kind is required for the present emergency: great towns will never be evangelized merely by the parochial system. I think that Religious Institutions [sic]... are the legitimate instruments of working upon a populace».

4. A sketch of a theology on the laity

The importance of the hierarchical element in the constitution and action of the Church, clearly noted and defended by Newman, did not hinder him from setting the foundation of what we could call an incipient theology of the Christian laity. Although this subject will be treated in greater depth in Chapter II, it deserves mention here as important contribution of Newman while an Anglican.

Numerous ecclesiastical documents of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries frequently present the clergy as being the whole of the Anglican Church. Without intending it, they identify the Church with the clerical order. Newman, while admitting the qualitative difference between clergy and laity, tries to make the laity more aware that they too constitute a living and active part of the Church.

He explains in a sermon of 1835 that in discussing the Church, at times the part (the clergy) is taken for the whole, but this manner of speaking should not blind one to the truth of the matter: «In like manner, speaking politically, we talk of the clergy as the Church: here is a parallel instance, in which a part of a body is viewed as the whole; still, who would say that the Laity are one Church by themselves, and the Clergy by themselves another?»

In another sermon he preaches that the gift of the Holy Spi-

36. DA, 41-2.
38. PS III, 223-4.
rit «is also imparted to every individual member of the Church» 39 and that this fact has important consequences for Christian life. In the first place, this doctrine properly understood and lived «would put a stop to much of the enthusiasm which prevails on all sides, while (it) might tend to dispel those cold and ordinary notions of religion which are the opposite extreme» 40.

Most of all, Christians should realize, as was already said in the Tracts, that the gift of the Holy Spirit makes them members of a chosen people. «Christians severally are, what the Jews collectively were, partakers of an especial covenant» 41. If the vocation of the chosen people supposes great privileges and graces, it implies at the same time serious responsibilities.

Keble calls these responsibilities to mind when speaking of «the position and peculiar danger of a chosen people (described so forcibly by the case of the Jews in the wilderness)» 42. And B. Harrison comments in Tract 16 that it is the personal responsibility of each Christian to make God’s gifts fructify: «When we are disposed to indulge in bright anticipations of coming glory to the Church, let us rather turn our thoughts inward to our individual privileges and individual responsibility, remembering that the Kingdom of God is within us, and that to whomsoever much is given, of him will be much required» 43.

Newman describes to what extent the well-being and doctrinal health of the Church are the charge of each baptized person in a letter to his sister Jemima, on the occasion of some unfortunate declarations of the bishop of Norwich about the absolute value of the Creed. «This I hold most decidedly,» he writes in September 1837, «that where Catholic Truth is denied (where it is, when men deny the grace of Baptism) any one, layman, woman, child, has a right to hold up the standard of faith against bishops, Archdeacons, and Clergy. It is a mere question of expediency how far they should do this..., but they have the right, and are bound, under these discretionary limits, to exercise it» 44.

Newman is even more explicit and severe in a letter to Mary Giberne two months later: «[the] bishop of Norwich [is]

39. Ibid., 266.
40. Ibid., 267.
42. Ibid., 8.
43. Ibid.
44. LD VI, 127.
driving fast at a denial of the Creed, which is heresy —and when a bishop is heretical, man, woman, or child has licence to oppose him. The faith is prior and dearer to us than the visible framework which is built upon it» 45.

Newman does nothing more here than apply to a concrete case a principle delineated in a sermon of 1834 46. Referring to I Tim 6, 20 («O Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust...»), he explains that although these «words are addressed in the first place to the Ministers of the Gospel, yet they contain a serious command for all Christians. For all of us, high and low, in our measure are responsible for the safe-keeping of the Faith. We all have an equal interest in it, no one less than another, though an Order of men has been especially set apart for the duty of guarding it» 47.

He goes on to point out that if the Faith of Christ were simply a matter of deduction or human invention, one would have reason to believe that the ministers of the Gospel were its only expounders and guardians. «but... the Gospel faith is a definite deposit, —a treasure, common to all, one and the same in every age, conceived in set words, and such as admits of being received, preserved, transmitted. We may safely leave the custody of it even in the hands of individuals» 48. Newman is not advocating here a type of license for each person to interpret the gospel as he wishes, but rather allowing Christian men to «contend earnestly for the Faith once delivered to the Saints»; the Faith which was put into their hands one by one at their Baptism, in a form of words called the Creed. He concludes that «this Faith is what even the humblest member of the Church may and must contend for; and in proportion to his education, will the circle of his knowledge enlarge» 49.

It was not mere coincidence that shortly before preaching this sermon, Newman published his important work The Arians of the Fourth Century (1833) where he lays out the results of his historical study of the conduct and role of the laity during the Arian controversy. The fact that laymen had preserved the

45. Ibid., 174.
46. The Gospel, a Trust committed to us, in PS II, 255-73.
47. Ibid., 255.
48. Ibid., 256.
49. Ibid.
orthodox faith in many places where the bishops had succumbed to Arianism had deeply affected him.

The vigor with which Newman describes the duties of the laity to defend the Church's doctrine seems to shift the emphasis of his previous sermons, in which he stresses rather the obligations of piety proper to a faithful Christian. «To do the part of a witness for the truth, to warn and rebuke, is not an elementary duty of a Christian. (...) Our first duties are to repent and believe. (...) It is difficult to say when a man has leave to openly rebuke others;... In all this I am speaking of laymen. It is a clergyman's duty to rebuke by virtue of his office» 50.

There is a shift of emphasis here, to be sure, but a continuity of ideas. The first duty of the Christian consists in believing, praying and practicing humility. Only if firmly grounded in these virtues will he be able to defend the Faith received without falling into self-love and a worldly spirit of confrontation.

In many of Newman's sermons of this time, he complains for one part of how little Christians understand and practice the gospel charge to pray, following the example of Mary, sister of Lazarus. He also laments the small number of Christians who respond generously to Our Lord's exhortation to pursue the ideal of a life of prayer 51.

This important group of doctrinal fragments which we find scattered throughout a multitude of letters, sermons and articles written before 1845 suggests the gradual development of a theological doctrine about the laity.

We come across an interesting formulation of this doctrine in a sermon preached in December 1840, The Three Offices of Christ 52. Here Newman offers a brief but rich exposition on the priesthood of the faithful, a topic which we will examine in more detail later on, but which we should at least mention briefly in this chapter.

The Three Offices of Christ should be read with another sermon of 1842 on the ministerial priesthood, entitled, The Christian Church an Imperial Power 53, which serves as its

50. PS I, 160-1.  
52. SD, 52-62.  
53. Ibid., 218-36.
complement. The former develops an idea which Newman had earlier discovered: that «all Christians are in one sense priests» 54.

Taking as a base Rev 1, 6 and I Jn 2, 20, one can argue that all Christians reflect the ministries of Christ: «not the few and conspicuous alone, but all her [the Church's] children, high and low... will be shadows of Him. All of us are bound according to our opportunities —first to learn the truth; and moreover we must impart our knowledge. Next we must bear witness to the truth. If so be, we must be willing to suffer for the truth» 55.

It is evident from all we have seen above that Newman as an Anglican had already arrived at quite a clear understanding and a deep appreciation of the laity and their role both in the Church and in society. Admittedly, many of his ideas during this period are still inchoate and would require time to be developed. Still, as an Anglican he provides us with a panoramic view of the Christian layman's responsibilities, which grow out of his vocation and life in the world.

A writing of 1840 encapsulates a concept of the laity which has reached a certain maturity: «It would be a great mistake for us to suppose that we need quit our temporal calling, and go into retirement, in order to serve God acceptably. Christianity is a religion for the world, for the busy and influential, for the rich and powerful, as well as for the poor» 56.

5. The laity as object of the preaching and catechesis of the Oxford Movement

Newman had conceived quite a high ideal of the layman and his role in the Church. But this ideal contrasted sharply with his impression of laymen formed by personal experience. It cannot be denied that Newman considered the majority of Anglican laymen he knew as spiritually impoverished persons, alienated from their ministers, frequently not practising their faith and thus ineffective in bringing the Church to society. «When... these writers [the Tractarians],» writes Newman retrospectively in 1850, «doubted whether Apostolical principles, as

54. LD VI, 26.
55. SD, 62.
56. HS II, 94.
they called them, would spread through the laity of England, they were doubting whether that laity lived, breathed, energised, in Apostolical principles; whether Apostolical principles were the just expression and the constituent element of the national sentiment» 57.

Newman and the Tractarians were not the first to perceive the ignorance and religious prejudice of their fellow countrymen. Samuel Johnson had observed and commented on it several decades earlier: «Our religion is in a book; we have an order of men whose duty it is to teach it; we have one day in the week set apart for it... yet ask the first ten gross men you meet, and hear what they can tell of their religion» 58.

It is the picture of a people ignorant of religion, in which some of the learned class are beginning to suffer the blight of rationalism and heresy. In Loss and Gain, Newman comments through the character of Beatson, a Professor of Divinity, «that the majority of the educated laity of our Church are Sabellians» 59.

Finding themselves before a similar situation, the Tractarians spared no effort in upgrading the standard of education and religious instruction. It can be said without fear of exaggeration that the Oxford Movement was the finest attempt ever made in the Church of England to educate her people in their religion.

The Tracts for the Times, begun in 1833, bear this statement out more than anything else. The Tracts are grouped into four main categories: 1) those addressed to the clergy (ad clericum); 2) those addressed to theological writers of a certain calibre (ad scholas); 3) those which gathered together texts of the Caroline divines; and finally 4) those written expressly for laymen (ad populum).

Nearly forty of the total of ninety Tracts are of this last category, and take up various topics related to doctrine, liturgy and discipline. They are marked by a clear desire to win over the popular sentiment, but at the same time boast an elevated tone, which indicates that they were intended for educated people as well 60.

57. Diff. I, 44.
59. LG, 20.
60. Newman comments on the tone of the Tracts to a friend: «Nor it is fair to look at each Tract by itself; each is part of a whole intended to effect one or
The Tracts deal with such topics as apostolic succession (n° 4), the nature of the Church (n° 58), and the duty of belonging to it (n° 29), the pastoral ministry and its divine origin (n° 17), the scriptural bases for these doctrines (n° 24), the meaning of the liturgy (n° 13, 16 & 56), and the ascetical life and mortification (n° 6 & 21).

Such a concentrated dissemination of religious doctrine, loaded with a considerable theological content which was at times hidden by its simple language, shows the confidence and optimism with which Newman and his friends took up the educational ideal they had set for themselves.

It is not surprising that they sometimes encountered difficulties in their great undertaking, as Newman insinuates in a letter of 1838 to Keble: «as is natural, I write for those I do see, viz the generation, lay or clerical, rising into active life, particularly at Oxford. That I am useful to them, by the way things which may be injudicious towards the Clergy, I am certain, whatever ultimately comes of it. I do not consider that for them I am going too fast» 61.

6. Fragments of a doctrine «De Populo Dei»

For Newman the education of the laity consisted of much more than mere religious propaganda, and his efforts to improve it went hand in hand with his desire to make the Church more popular. This was one of the objects of the Oxford Movement.

The Tractarians thought that the Anglican Church in 1833 was «too much a Church for the Aristocracy» 62, and, given the fact that the aristocracy and political class were abandoning the Church for reasons of comfort, it was necessary that the new revival go directly «to the people» 63 for support and confirmation of its doctrines.

two great ends. Hence the different tone of them (which you notice) and which, be assured, does not arise from difference in the writers —but the same writer aiming (whether or not from error of judgment) at the same ends in a different way» (LD IV, 117).
61. LD VI, 350.
62. LD V, 275.
63. British Magazine, October 1833, 422.
These ideas seem to have originated with Hurrell Froude, who bequeathed them to Newman as part of his testament of suggestions and projects. Some think that Froude was influenced in this matter by the ecclesial populism defended in France by Lamennais, but the extent and meaning of such an influence has not yet been satisfactorily determined.

In any case, the idea of bringing the Church to the people and vice-versa is a common one in the letters and writings of Newman, even if it is not possible to formulate a coherent doctrine from his fragmentary observations.

One of Newman's letters to Matthew Arnold, written in 1871, informs us that «it was one of Hurrell Froude's main views that the Church must alter her position in the political world —and, when he heard of Lamennais, he took up his views with great eagerness» 64.

Newman had made this idea his own and expounded it in his writings, although always with a certain polemical overtone and in a vague, imprecise way. Rather than the expression of a definite concept of the Church, many times Newman appears to use this idea to criticize the upper classes who had abandoned the Church and the politicians, who had dared to reform it from the outside: «Those who live by the breath of state patronage,» he writes in 1834, «who think the clergy must be gentlemen, and the Church must rest on the great, not the multitude, of course are desponding. Woe to the profane hands who rob us of privilege or possessions, but they can do us no harm» 65.

The same idea appears a few years later with a clearer intent of systematizing in The Church of the Fathers (1840). Although the language is more precise, the key texts mix an undeveloped ecclesiology of populo Dei with more general considerations about the critical state of the Anglican Church. The following passage is typical:

«Hitherto the English Church has depended on the State, i.e., on the ruling powers in the country —the king and the aristocracy; and this is so natural and religious a position of things when viewed in the abstract, and in its actual working has been productive of such excellent fruits in the Church, such

64. LD XXV, 442.
65. LD IV, 227.
quietness, such sobriety, such external propriety of conduct, and such freedom from doctrinal excesses, that we must ever look back upon the period of ecclesiastical history so characterized with affectionate thoughts; particularly on the reigns of our blessed martyr St. Charles, and King George the Good. But these recollections of the past must not engross our minds, or hinder us from looking at things as they are, and as they will be soon, and from inquiring what is intended by Providence to take the place of the time honoured instrument, which He has broken (if it be yet be broken), the regal and aristocratical power. I shall offend many men when I say, we must look to the people; but let them give me a hearing» 66.

The historical circumstances in which these texts were written do not allow us to draw any sure conclusions from them about Newman's idea of the layman's place in the Church. At any rate, it seems that Newman practically abandoned this line of investigation into the mystery of the visible Church when he left Anglicanism.

II. THE ESSENCE OF THE LAITY

1. The Laity as a part of the Church

A. The Lay Element in the Visible Church

The findings of chapter one showed that Newman had arrived at a considerably profound and complete understanding of the laity even before his conversion, startling as this may be for us of the twentieth century. But one feels inclined to ask, why, then, did Newman not make much more of his insights into the laity and their role in the Church? The reason is that the whole idea of the laity as an integral part of the Church was not really a discovery for Newman as it has been for us in recent years. Rather, it was an idea he had in some ways inherited and later developed on his own as a member of the Anglican Church.

66. HS I, 340.
We observe this if we look at the concept of the Church presented by his sermons. Newman’s concept of the Church is obviously a very broad theme which cannot be treated in depth here. However, we will want to examine it to some extent because of its close relationship with the laity.

The sermon *The Church Visible and Invisible*, preached in 1835, gives a clear picture of Newman’s concept of the Church and the laity as a part within it: «... no harm can come of the distinction of the Church into Visible and Invisible, while we view it as, on the whole, but one in different aspects, as Visible, because consisting (for instance) of clergy and laity—as Invisible, because resting for its life and strength upon unseen influences and gifts from Heaven» 67.

Further on in the same sermon, he speaks more directly of the laity while insisting on the oneness of the Church: «In like manner, speaking politically, we talk of the clergy as the Church: here is a parallel instance, in which a part of a body is viewed as the whole; still, who would say that the Laity are one Church by themselves, and the Clergy by themselves another?» 68.

Some thirty years later in *A Letter to Pusey* (1864) we find the same idea surfacing: «The convert comes, not only to believe the Church, but also to trust and obey her priests, and to conform himself in charity to her people» 69.

It is clear then that for Newman the Church is always one and consists of two essential elements, the clergy and the laity, neither of which alone can adequately represent the Church.

Newman warns that when speaking of the Church and its members, one must be careful not to take the part for the whole by saying, for example, that the Pope or the bishops are the Church. He himself takes special care to make this distinction as we observe in some significant passages of the preface to the third edition of *The Via Media of the Anglican Church* (1877). In the first of these passages he says that in the

67. *PS* III, 222.
68. *Ibid.*, 223-4. It is curious that, here as in many other places, Newman capitalizes the word «laity» as if thereby giving laymen some type of formal recognition.
Church the whole is more than the parts and prior to them, and he applies this thought to the Roman Pontiff with the following words: «I am speaking here of the Body of Christ, and the sovereign Pontiff would not be the visible head of that Body, did he not first belong to it. He is not himself the Body of Christ, but the chief part of the Body» (xi).

This consideration does not stop Newman from later identifying the Pope with the Church from the perspective of infallibility in the canonization of saints. He says, in these matters «the Church (that is, the Pope) must be infallible» (lxxxiv).

Accordingly, both the laity and the clergy are essential parts of the one visible Church for Newman, but he does not consider the two synonymous or interchangeable. There is a qualitative difference between the two in that the clergy has received a specific mandate from Christ to guide souls to heaven: «He has given us something outward as a guide to what is inward, something visible as a guide to what is spiritual. (...) Now, what is that outward visible guide, having the dispensation of what is unseen, but the Christian Ministry, which directs and leads us to the very Holy of Holies...» 70.

To fulfill this mission of guiding souls effectively, Christ has given His Apostles and their successors the necessary authority, embodied in the power of the keys, so that they can truly be called rulers of the Church: «by the ‘Church’ must be meant a community or polity of men, and you see that St. Peter had the keys of this Church of kingdom or the power of admitting into it, and excluding from it» 71.

A passage from Arians shows by contrast that laymen lack this authority; they cannot be considered to represent the Church formally, vis-à-vis the world: the early Christian apologists «were frequently laymen, and so did not commit the Church as a body, not even in its separate authorities, to formal statements or theological discussion» 72.

70. PS IV, 173.
71. SD, 222.
72. Ari., 51.
B. The Invisible Church and Platonism. The Matter and Form of an Ecclesial Society

As an Anglican, Newman fully believed in the existence of a visible Church formally represented by the clergy. He further stipulated adherence to the word of Christ’s ministers as a necessary condition for salvation. This line of thought indicates how far he was above traditional Protestant opinion, which denied the existence of a visible Church.

There is, however, much more to the Church than simply this visible aspect, important as it is. Newman observes that the visible Church, which consists of parts, is itself only a part of that reality we know as Church: «the visible ministry on earth, the Bishops and Pastor, together with Christians depending on them, at this or that day is called the Church, though really but a fragment of it, as being that part of it which is seen and can be pointed out, and as resembling it in type, and witnessing it, and leading towards it. This invisible body is the true Church, because it changes not, though it is ever increasing» 73.

The visible Church is clearly subservient and auxiliary to the invisible Church: «the bodily presence of Bishop and people, are given us as keys and spells, by which we bring ourselves into the presence of the great company of saints; they are as much as this, but they are no more; they are not identical with that company; they are but the outskirts of it; they are but porches to the pool of Bethesda, entrances into that which is indivisible and one» 74.

Newman emphasizes the invisible character of the Church even more strongly in his sermon The Visible Temple. «This Temple [the Church] is invisible,» he says, «but is perfect and real because it is invisible, and gains nothing in perfection by possessing visible tokens» 75. The concept of the Church which Newman proposes here is indeed very spiritual. However, his strong emphasis on the spiritual differs substantially from the classical Lutheran and Protestant view of the Church, for Newman maintains the reality of the visible Church which Protes-

73. PS IV, 174-5.
74. Ibid., 176.
75. PS VI, 280-1.
tantism flatly rejects. If one were to identify the origen of Newman's accent on the spiritual, one would have to say that, rather than Protestant, it is platonic. As a genuine Platonist, Newman thinks that no visible reality or phenomena is the complete or ultimate reality. The visible Church is the reflection of an invisible Church which is the true ecclesial reality.

The invisible, spiritual nature of the Church leads us to another of its characteristics: the Church is living. Newman cautions us against the tendency to form a concept of the Church which is static and based solely on appearances. The Church is indeed a Temple, but «its members do not depend merely on what is visible, they are not mere stones of a building, piled on one another, and bound together from without, but they are... ‘living stones,’ internally connected as branches from a tree, not as parts from a heap. They are members of the Body of Christ» 76. «The first Christians were a living body [and] Catholics... as their forefathers... are a living body» 77.

Moreover, the Church's unity flows from this inner life. «Its being alive is what makes it one; were it dead, it would consist of as many parts as it has members; the Living Spirit of God came down upon it at Pentecost, and made it one, by giving it life» 78.

Although Newman was deeply convinced of the Church's supernatural character, he was by no means blind to the frailties of her children. «That Holy House which Christ formed in order to be the treasury and channel of His grace to mankind... was, even from (the Apostles') time, the seat of unbelief and unholiness as well as of the true religion. Even among the Apostles themselves, one was ‘a devil.’ No wonder then that ever since, whether among the rulers or the subjects of the Church, sin has abounded, where nothing but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit should have been found. It is so in this day; our eyes see it; we cannot deny it» 79.

Together with this conviction that the Church was a net which gathered in fish of every sort, Newman points out that a chosen few are the special object of her labors.

76. PS IV, 170.
77. Prepos., 322.
78. Ibid., 171.
79. PS III, 220.
He writes: «There are in every age a certain number of souls in the world, known to God, unknown to us, who will obey the Truth when offered to them, whatever be the mysterious reason that they do and others do not. (...) They are the true Church, ever increasing in number, ever gathering in, as time goes on».

It is not that the Church directs her efforts only to a few; in fact, she tries as best she can to make her saving doctrine known to all men, but few there are who take her teaching to heart.

In another sermon *The Communion of Saints*, Newman goes so far as to identify the true Church with those few who correspond to God’s calling: «The Church, then, properly considered, is that great company of the elect, which has been separated by God’s free grace, and His Spirit... from this sinful world, regenerated and vouchsafed perseverance unto life eternal».

These last two quotations, although completely in accord with Catholic doctrine, convey a strong sense of predestination which perhaps originates from Newman’s contact with Calvinism.

To sum up, the Church for Newman is pre-eminently one. This oneness comes from the Holy Spirit, who acts as her Soul, vivifying all her members.

Further, this one Church has two parts, or, better said, two aspects—visible and invisible— which we distinguish in ordinary conversation, but which are in fact inseparable. The visible Church consists of the clergy and laity.

In a revealing letter to Matthew Arnold written in 1876 (some forty years after these sermons were preached) Newman spells out more concretely how he conceives the relationship of the clergy and laity to each other and to the Church as a whole.

Says he: «Nor can I follow you in thinking that by ‘the Church’ ought to be meant ‘the laity’, any more than the word is equivalent to ‘the clergy’. I think the people are the *matter*,

80. *PS* IV, 153.
and the hierarchy the *form*, and that both together make up the Church. If you object that this virtually throws the initiative and the decision of questions into the hands of the clergy, this is but an internal peculiarity of the Catholic Religion.

«The Anglican Church is also made up of a like form and matter; though here in consequence of the genius of Anglicanism, the power of the matter predominates. But if you attempt to destroy the existing relation between form and matter, whether in Anglicanism or Catholicism, you change the religion; it is more honest to refuse to recognize Catholicism, than to refuse to take it as it is» 82.

This passage provides a key insight into why Newman was so far ahead of other figures of his time, especially Catholics, in recognizing the importance of the laity: because «in consequence of the genius of Anglicanism, the power of the matter [the laity] predominates», whereas the tradition of Catholicism was just the opposite —the clergy had control.

Finally, important as the visible Church was, it held second place in Newman's mind to the invisible Church, which is for him the Church properly speaking, «that great invisible company, who are one and all incorporate in the one mystical body of Christ, and quickened by one Spirit» 83.

It is this Church which gives Christians their identity, but refuses to be identified with the sum of them because it is something from above. The Church for Newman is a whole, not only greater than any of its parts, but also greater than the sum of them. And in this sense it is truly a *mystery*.

Newman highlights the transcendental character of the Church in a sermon of 1839 which amounts to a summary of his thought on this issue. He writes: «(the) Church made you what you are, as far as you are Christian; and the Church that made you has a right to rule you, and to protest against you when you will not be ruled; she has a right to bid you follow her, and to claim jurisdiction over you, for you are hers» 84.

82. *LD* XXVIII, 6.
2. The offices of the laity

We have considered Newman's idea of the laity as viewed from his concept of the Church. We should study now what characteristics in concrete mark the essence of the laity within the Church itself.

Newman gives us a good idea of what the layman's vocation entails in a sermon preached in 1840, *The Three Offices of Christ*. There he observes that Christ as Mediator exercised the roles or Prophet, King, and Priest. He fulfilled the prophetical office by teaching, the priestly office by suffering, and the regal office by an active life of work.

Newman points out that these offices apply to mankind as a whole, for they «seem to contain in them and to represent the three principal conditions of mankind: for one large class of men, or aspect of mankind, is that of sufferers, —such as slaves, the oppressed, the poor, the sick, the bereaved, the troubled in mind; another is, of those who work and toil, who are full of business and engagements, whether for themselves or for others; and a third is that of the studious, the learned, and the wise. Endurance, active life, thought —these are the three perhaps principal states in which men find themselves. Christ undertook them all».

Moreover, these three offices apply not only to mankind as a whole, but also to every person, and in a pre-eminent way to priests. Christ «left behind Him those who should take his place, a ministerial order, who are His representatives and instruments; and they, though earthen vessels, show forth according to their measure these three characters, —the prophetical, priestly, and regal...».

It is worth noting, too, that the said sermon was not the first occasion in which Newman applied these three offices to priests.

Some six years earlier in his sermon *The Christian Ministry* (1834), he had preached that the «Apostles... were... exalted by office far above any divine messengers before them.

85. *SD*, 52-62.
We come to the same conclusion considering the sacred treasures committed to their custody, which... were those peculiar spiritual blessings which flow from Christ as Saviour, as a Prophet, Priest, and King\(^8\).

Newman goes on to specify: «Christ is a Prophet, as authoritatively revealing the will of God and the Gospel of Grace. So also were the Apostles. Christ is a Priest, as forgiving sin, and imparting other needful divine gifts. The Apostles, too, had this power... Christ is a King, as ruling the Church; and the Apostles rule it in his stead\(^9\). Newman later explains that this triple office of the Apostles has descended to Christ's ministers after them.

It is Christ's ministers, then, who exercise these functions in a formal way. Still, «all His followers in some way bear all three offices\(^9\). Just as Christ assumed our entire human nature that he might sanctify every part of it, so «did He unite in Himself, and renew and give us back in Him, the principal lots or states in which we find ourselves, —suffering, that we might know how to suffer; labouring, that we might know how to labour; and teaching, that we might how to teach\(^9\).\>

In *The Three Offices of Christ*, Newman seems content simply to state this truth without going into detail about how the layman is to live each of these three roles. However, he does elaborate on this subject in other writings, especially his sermons, and this we shall see in the forthcoming pages.

Before going on to that, we should take note of one more enlightening remark which Newman makes on the subject. He points out that we find the *three offices* in society, but always in a defective way and never together in the same individuals.

For example, statesmen resemble Christ in that they possess ruling power, but their power is really very different from Christ's, both in kind and in the way it is acquired. Christ ruled «not like conquerors of the earth, but by love; not by fear, not by strength of arm, but by wisdom of heart, convin-

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90. *SD*, 55.
cing, persuading, enlightening, founding an empire upon faith, and ruling by a sovereignty over the conscience» ⁹². Moreover, Our Lord's power was gained by suffering and humility, not inherited.

In like manner philosophers and intellectuals exercise the prophetical office. They reveal great truths to men, such as, for example, the goodness and importance of a virtuous life. But frequently the moral conduct of these men belies the very truths they so beautifully expound, and this greatly lessens their effectiveness. They lack that self-denial and virtue which are proper to the priestly office.

The ultimate reason for the defectiveness and contrariety of these offices as found in civil society, Newman explains, is original sin. But Christ purified and reunited these apparently contradictory conditions of life by His coming. Writes Newman: «Christ came to make a new world, He came into the world to regenerate it in Himself, to make a new beginning, to be the beginning of the creation of God, to gather into one, and recapitulate all things in Himself. The rays of His glory were scattered through the world; one state of life had some of them, another others. The world was like some fair mirror, broken in pieces, and giving back no one uniform image of its Maker. But He came to combine what was dissipated, to recast what was shattered in Himself» ⁹³.

Thus, Christ «combined together offices and duties most dissimilar. He suffered, yet He triumphed. He thought and spoke, yet He acted. He was humble and despised, yet He was a teacher» ⁹⁴.

Christians too, precisely because they are called to be other Christs, have the power and duty to exercise all these offices together and in a perfect way. Newman wanted the Christian to rediscover and live that unity of purpose and conduct which was lost by his first parents, and later restored by Christ. And this desire was the driving force behind many of his initiatives later in life, as we shall see.

⁹². Ibid., 59.
⁹³. Ibid., 61.
⁹⁴. Ibid., 54.
3. The Common Priesthood of the Faithful

A. Historical Coordinates of Newman’s Ideas on the Priesthood of the Faithful

The subject known today as the common priesthood of the faithful or the general priesthood (as distinct from the ministerial priesthood) is one that occupies an important place in the writings of Newman. Although his treatment of this theme is only fragmentary, it represents a noteworthy anticipation—perhaps not the only one—of the theology which would later find expression in the documents of Vatican II.

Newman set a precedent first of all by clearly delineating the existence of the common priesthood, that is, the fact that «all Christians are in one sense priests» 95. He discusses this issue without the terminological and conceptual limitations which are typical of post-Tridentine Catholic theology 96.

His treatment of the subject is also novel in that he never defends the common priesthood to the detriment of the ministerial priesthood. The ministerial priesthood—that which is proper to Christians who have received holy orders—is for Newman the priesthood par excellence.

His idea of the priesthood of the faithful might be traced to a possible influence of the Calvinist tradition in which he was formed during his youth. Newman, however, steered clear of the reductionist excesses of this tradition, which in theory and in practice lowers the importance of the ministerial priesthood, «the ministry of Word and Sacraments.» One could say that Newman corrects the ambiguities of Calvin 97 and at the same time clearly disagrees with Luther’s idea that laity and priests are essentially the same 98.

97. «A close examination of Calvin’s thought on the priesthood of Christians and the role of the ministry of Word and Sacraments reveals a certain ambivalence. Calvin was anxious to protect the ministerial order, founded upon the Word of God». J. R. CRAWFORD, *Calvin and the Priesthood of all Believers*, in *Scottish Journal of Theology*, XXI (1968) 145.
It should be pointed out that this idea of the common priesthood, which Newman recovers fully for the Catholic tradition, was already present in the writings and commentaries of the Church Fathers, especially those of Origen (cfr. *Hom in Leviticum IX, MG 12, 521, C*), Chrysostom (cfr. *In Epist. II ad Cor. Hom. III, MG 61, 417-8*) and Augustine (*Quaestio-num Evangeliorum, 1, 2 ML 35, 1355*) when they comment on I Petr 2, 9.

Newman’s approach completes, in the first place, the terminology and perspectives of the *Roman Catechism*. With a certain lack of clarity understandable for the time in which it was written, this document describes what it calls the *interior priesthood* as something belonging to all the faithful by virtue of baptism 99.

Newman supersedes the cautious interpretations and commentaries of the Catechism made in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries by Francisco de Toledo, Peter Canisius, Gabriel Vázquez, Robert Bellarmine, D. Petavius, L. Tomasino and Ch. Billuart, among others 100. All these authors limit themselves simply to stating in few words the relationship between the priesthood of the faithful and the character of baptism, which is viewed as a participation in the priesthood of Christ.

Not until Matthias Scheeben does one find in the Catholic world a fuller exposition of the common priesthood. But Scheeben began his *Dogmatics* in 1873, while Newman had discussed the subject as early as 1830 or thereabouts 101.

Long before the doctrine of the common priesthood was stated in strict terms by Pius XI (Enc. *Miserentissimus Redemp-tor, May 8, 1928*) and Pius XII (Elocution *Magnificat Dominum*, Nov. 2, 1954; Enc. *Mediator Dei*, Nov. 20, 1947), and treated more fully by the Constitution *Lumen Gentium* (n° 10) of Vatican II, it had been formulated with sufficient clarity in the sermons and letters of Newman.

101. In this sense, the order in which Dabin presents these authors (Scheeben on p. 468 and Newman on p. 473) is misleading.
Newman’s originality stands out even more when one considers that the well-known archbishop and competent theologian Cardinal Manning makes no allusion to the common priesthood of the faithful in his celebrated work *The Eternal Priesthood*, published in London in 1883.

The contention that baptized persons participate in the priestly office of Christ and that this real participation has important consequences is found in *The Arians of the Fourth Century* (1833) and other writings of Newman of the same period (vide supra, chap. I).

But it is in 1840 that Newman offers us for the first time a systematic treatment of the subject in his sermon *The Three Offices of Christ* 102. He speaks first of the priestly condition of Christ 103, and remarks that presbyters, insofar as ordained priest, are his most direct representatives: «He left behind Him those who should take His place, a ministerial order, who are His representatives and instruments... to suffer, to teach, to rule» 104.

He goes on to say that «all His followers in some sense bear three offices, as Scripture is not slow to declare» 105. As support for his claim, he cites Rev 1, 6: «(Jesus Christ) made us a line of Kings and priests to serve his God and Father», and I John 2, 20: «you have been anointed by the Holy One, and have all received the knowledge.»

The priestly condition of the Christian appears in this sermon united to other aspects —the prophetic and regal—which derive from the offices of Christ. But these latter aspects hardly receive any further consideration in the sermon 106.

Newman seeks rather to stress that participation in these offices is the privilege of every baptized person: «Not the few and the conspicuous alone, but all her [the Church’s] children, high and low... will be shadows of Him. All of us are bound, according to our opportunities —first to learn the truth; and

102. *SD*, 52-62.
103. «His third special office... is that of a Priest», *SD* 52.
105. *Ibid*.
106. «Knowledge, power, endurance, are the three privileges of the Christian Church; endurance, as represented in the confessor and monk; wisdom, in the doctor and teacher; power, in the bishop and pastor» (*SD*, 56).
moreover, we must impart our knowledge. Next we must bear witness to the truth. If so be, we must be willing to suffer for the truth» 107.

B. The Priesthood of the Faithful and the Ministerial Priesthood

Great as this privilege of the common priesthood is, it is still essentially different from the ministerial priesthood. It is on this point that Newman clarifies the ambiguities of Calvinism and the Anglican Evangelical groups, which had reduced to a bare minimum what was peculiar to the ordained ministry. Newman, on the contrary, argues that not all Christians are priests in the sense that this word is ordinarily understood.

A revealing passage of a sermon preached in 1842 108 illustrates very well Newman's thought on this point. Says he: «Men now-a-days consider the Christian minister to be merely one who teaches the unlearned, rouses the sinful, consoles the afflicted, and relieves the poor. Great and Gospel offices these indeed, but who made them the privilege of a particular order of men? Great and Gospel offices, so great, so full of Gospel savour, that they are the prerogatives of all Christians, and may not be confined to a class. If the ministerial office consist in these alone, then all Christians are ministers. Men have a notion, that the mere function of reading prayers in public worship, and preaching sermons, constitutes a minister of Christ: where is this found in Scripture?» 109.

There is, then, a fundamental difference between the ministerial and common priesthood, and this difference is reflected in their functions. Conversely, this diversity of functions implies a difference in nature.

Already in 1829 Newman had defended the exclusiveness of certain functions entrusted by God to the pastors of the Church. He grounds his defense on the idea that the divine economy of salvation operates on the principle that God uses a few individuals as the channel and instrument of the salvation of many.

107. Ibid., 62.
108. The Christian Church an Imperial Power, in SD, 218 ff.
109. Ibid., 227-8.
This principle helps explain, according to Newman, the existence and necessity of the ministerial priesthood in the Church, which Jesus Christ has endowed with his own authority. «Christianity,» says Newman «is a blessing for the whole earth— but it does not therefore follow that none have been specially commissioned to dispense the blessing. Mercies given to multitudes are not less mercies because they are made to flow from particular sources.

«Indeed, most of the great appointments of Divine goodness are marked by this very character of what men call exclusiveness. God distributes numberless benefits to all men, but He does through a few select instruments. The few are favoured for the good of the many» 110.

C. Manifestations of the Priesthood of the Faithful

To uphold the ministerial priesthood does not imply, however, the practical dissolution of the common priesthood of all Christians. This last text could be applied in some sense to all Christians, whose vocation makes them intermediaries between God and man. And, in fact, Newman does not rule out this interpretation of his words. He assigns to the faithful specific functions which derive from the priesthood they have received by baptism.

In Sermon Notes, Newman speaks of the «royal priesthood» mentioned in I Petr 2, 9, and infers from this priesthood the capacity that all Christians have to express their faith collectively, though in a passive way, without falling into error 111. To be sure, the sensus fidelium (vide infra, chap, II, 4) does not derive for Newman from the priestly office, but from the prophetic. The connection between the sensus fidelium and the priestly office is not typical of Newman’s thought.

The royal priesthood somehow qualifies the baptized person to carry out a function in worship, since every Christian is an integral part of the visible Church which gives worship to God. «Our tongues must preach Him, and our voices sing Him, and

110. Submission to Church Authority, in PS III, 194.
111. Cfr. SN, 77.
our knees adore Him, and our heads bow before Him, and our
countenances beam of Him» 112.

This participation in worship represents a true privilege, by
which every Christian is allowed to take part in the visible ado­
ration of God and come into contact with the divine mysteries.

Laymen and priests unite, according to the functions which
each order should carry out, in the public cult which the whole
Church gives: «And hence arise joint worship, forms of prayer,
ceremonies of devotion, the course of services, orders of minis­
ters, holy vestments, solemn music, and other things of a
like nature» 113.

Every Christian is called to exercise, besides, a sort of
priestly intercessory function. Newman explains this in some
detail in a sermon of 1835 entitled Intercession 114. The power
of mediation, which belongs, strictly speaking, only to Christ, is
inherited by every Christian as a right and responsibility.

«The privilege of Intercession,» writes Newman «is the
Christian's especial prerogative; and if he does not exercise it,
certainly he has not risen to the conception of his real place
among created things» 115.

The danger exists, that many think such a view exaggerated,
especially when they consider their weak and sinful condition.
Newman energetically heads off this possible objection: «Say not
he is a son of Adam, and has to undergo a future judgment; I
know it; but he is something besides... Viewed in himself, he
ever prays for pardon, and confesses sin; but viewed in Christ,
he ‘has access into this grace wherein we stand.’ Viewed in his
place in ‘the Church of the First-born enrolled in heaven,’ with
his original debt cancelled in Baptism... accepted in the Belo­
vned, clad in the garments of righteousness, anointed with oil,
and with a crown upon his head, in royal and priestly garb... such
an one, I repeat it, is plainly in his fitting place when
he intercedes» 116.

112. PS VI, 287.
113. Ibid.
114. PS III, 350-66.
115. Ibid., 362.
116. Ibid., 362-3.
For Newman, the Christian, who is made after the pattern of Christ, intercedes below while Christ does it above. Since every layman has a capacity for high things his prayer can take on a higher and higher range, and contemplate not only himself, but others also.

He is taken into the counsels of His Lord; he reads in Scripture what the many cannot see there: the course of God's providence and the patterns or rules of divine government in the world. He also views the events of history with a sort of spiritually enlightened eye.  

Newman generally tends to combine aspects of the priestly office with others that seem more proper of the prophetic office. It is as if he thought that the dispensation of Christ's work of salvation in these three offices — priestly, prophetic, and regal — should not be interpreted too rigidly, because it is not what a scholastic would call adequata.

The three offices overlap with each other, but even when taken together, do not exhaust all the richness of Christ or his mission as Saviour.

This consideration also applies to the Christian in whose vocation the priestly aspect cannot be clearly separated from the rest.

4. The «Sensus Fidelium»

A. The Formation of a Doctrine

«I want your view of the extent of power which may be given to the laity in the Church system — e. g. the maintenance of the faith is their clear prerogative...»

So reads a request which Newman directed in June 1835 to the refined and well-educated religious mind of Hurrell Froude. It is an urgent question born of his concern for the difficult period the Anglican Church was going through, abandoned as Newman saw it by the governing powers of England which till then had been its...
support: the British crown, and the secular as well as ecclesiastical aristocracy.

His studies of the Arian heresy of the fourth century, which had revealed to him the doctrinal instinct of the Christian people, prepared him to deal now with the critical situation of the Anglican Church.

He had reached the conclusion that the Church's children had a special gift for understanding the faith which enabled them to distinguish spontaneously, in moments of crisis, between true and erroneous doctrines. In such instances, the Christian people acted as the voice of the Church.

In Newman the Anglican of 1835, we observe a very definite interest in the Christian laity and their role within the Church as preservers of the faith. Both crises—that of the Church in the fourth century and of Anglicanism in his own day—seemed analogous to Newman.

The situation of the Church in the fourth century served as a warning and offered a valuable lesson for Anglicanism in the 1830s. The similarity of historical circumstances and the lesson learned from the Church of the Fathers would, besides, enable Newman to formulate a very important principle about the laity which would occupy his thought and activity the rest of his life. The idea of the *sensus fidelium* from Newman's time would be incorporated into Christian theology and with time would acquire more definite traits.

Some twenty years later, in his *Lectures on the Present Position of Catholics in England* delivered in Birmingham in 1851, Newman alludes to the doctrine which «has ever lived... in the hearts and on the tongues of the Catholic people» 119. His words here are nothing new; the same terms can be found in the polemic writings of Thomas More 120. Nevertheless, for Newman these words enclosed an idea which would develop with time into quite a novel theological doctrine.

One of the events which incited Newman to express his thoughts more fully was a dispute which arose between the

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English bishops and some of the Catholic laity on the question of education. Newman took occasion to comment on the matter in the May (1859) issue of the Rambler. He expressed his concern that in public affairs such as education the laity had to have a certain guiding voice within the Catholic community. Newman thus addressed himself in the most respectful terms to the bishops in the May issue of the Rambler: «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».

B. On Consulting the Faithful in Matters of Doctrine (1859)

Newman would have to explain in depth his marginal comment on doctrinal questions two months later in the famous article On Consulting the Faithful in Matters of Doctrine.

Consulting is a cautious but elegant defense of the rights of the laity, which combines in a truly masterful way prudence with originality. The basic line of the article can be easily summed up.

121. A Royal Commission on elementary education had been appointed without any Catholic representative because the Catholic Poor Schools Committee had requested one too late. The bishops did not want to cooperate with the Commission even though this meant loss of government subsidies, because they feared state interference in religious teaching. In deciding against the Commission, the bishops had not consulted the laity.


124. About Consulting, Y. Congar observes that Newman's depiction of the Arian crisis can be misleading because he treats only one aspect of the problem and bases his argument on accounts supplied in most cases by lay historians, such as Socrates and Sozomeno, who are favorable to the laity. Still, Congar admits the truth of Newman's main thesis that it was the Christian laity who were chiefly responsible for putting down Arianism. Cfr. Y. CONGAR, Jalones para una Teologia del Laicado, Barcelona 1965, 345.
Newman’s main intention in Consulting is to show the doctrinal and practical implications of the cited historical texts. When the hierarchy of the Church consults the Christian people in practical matters, it is really seeking an opinion which will influence the decisions it will later make. When the consulting concerns matters of the Catholic faith, the hierarchy seeks only to verify the existence of a given doctrine.

Newman could have well illustrated his idea in the latter case with the words he wrote to W. G. Ward in March 1849. He was writing Ward about the encyclical Ubi primum (2 Feb. 1849), which inquired into the feelings of the bishops and faithful about the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception: «the Pope... does not say a word, as far as I recollect, about the antiquity of the doctrine, but he wishes to know if the Catholic people call for it. By the bye, what will Dr. Wiseman report as the opinion, feeling, view, desire, of the faithful in the London District? What is their secret, but overflowing, precise, living tradition?»

As early as 1849, then, Newman had suggested the meaning of the word «consult,» which he would explain ten years later in his famous Rambler article. It is a word, he will say, which expresses confidence and deference, but not submission. It includes, of course, the idea of «inquiring into a fact, as well as asking a judgment».

In the case of the Holy See or the bishops who question the Christian faithful about a definable aspect of the faith, the faithful’s «advice, their opinion, their judgment on the question of definition is not asked; but the matter of fact, viz. their belief, is sought for, as a testimony to that apostolical tradition, on which alone any doctrine whatsoever can be defined»

In the same sense, Newman goes on to explain, we can «consult» the liturgies or rites of the Church, not because they speak, but because they are witnesses to the antiquity or universality of the doctrines which they contain

125. LD XIII, 81-2.
126. Consulting, 54.
127. Ibid., 54-5.
128. Ibid., 55.
The *fidelium sensus* and *consensus* is, therefore, an aspect of the evidence that the Church should take into account before settling on a definition 129. Their testimony is consulted because it is an aspect of Tradition and because their consensus can be taken as the voice of the infallible Church.

The Tradition of the Apostles, in effect, manifests itself in various ways. It lives in the episcopacy, in the doctors, in the Catholic people, in the liturgies, rites and ceremonies, in Church movements and other phenomena scattered throughout Christian history 130.

C. The Infallibility of the Christian People «in credendo»

In *Consulting*, Newman enriches the Church’s doctrine concerning the different ways in which the Apostolic tradition expresses itself. Passages in the first edition of *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* (1845) which relate to this theme 131, synthesize what he had earlier said in *Lectures on the Prophetic Office of the Church* (written in 1836, published in 1837). In these lectures Newman describes prophets and doctors as mere channels of what he then called the Prophetic Tradition.

None of these channels of Tradition can be overlooked, even if it is necessary to grant at the same time that the gift of discerning, separating, defining, promulgating and enforcing any aspect of Tradition resides only in the *Ecclesia docens* 132. «For myself,» adds Newman «I am accustomed to lay great stress on the consensus fidelium» 133.

He then proceeds to show how Catholic theology of previous centuries (Canus, Gregory, Valerius, Petavius, and others) provide a firm basis for his views. In his argument, Newman makes extensive use of Perrone’s findings laid out in his opusculum on

129. «the fidelium sensus and consensus is a branch of evidence which it is natural or necessary for the Church to regard and consult, before she proceeds to any definition...» (*Consulting*, 55).
the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, *De Immaculato Beatae Mariae Virginis Conceptu* (1847). With due respect for the exact meaning contained in the observations of the illustrious Jesuit professor, Newman tries, still, to draw out of them all the insights which help illustrate and support his own opinion.

Newman also brings in the papal Bull of 1854 as an authoritative back-up for his view. He reminds the reader of the different witnesses to ancient tradition, which the Bull lists: «divina eloquia, veneranda traditio, perpetuus Ecclesiae sensus, singularis catholicum Antistitum ac fidelium conspiratio» \(^{134}\). And he makes the following insightful commentary on the text cited: «Conspiratio; the two, the Church teaching and the Church taught, are put together, as one twofold testimony, illustrating each other, and never to be divided» \(^{135}\).

The Christian people are, therefore, a mirror in which the bishops see themselves. The consensus which Christians manifest is not itself infallible, but it is a faithful indication or *instrumentum* of the doctrinal judgment of the infallible Church.

Summing up, Newman tells us that Catholic theology has considered this *consensus* of the faithful: a) as a testimony to the fact of apostolic dogmas; b) as an instinct or *phronena* which dwells in the bosom of the mystical body of Christ; c) as an impulse of teaching of the Holy Spirit; as a divine answer to Christian prayer; and d) as a resistance to error \(^{136}\). By way of example, Newman recalls that «the Nicene dogma was maintained during the greater part of the 4th century, 1. not by the unswerving firmness of the Holy See, Councils, or Bishops, but 2. by the ‘consensus fidelium’» \(^{137}\).

In speaking thus, Newman of course does not deny that the body of bishops taken together was orthodox, or that many of the clergy stood by the laity as a support and guide, or that the laity had first received the Faith by means of bishops and priests; or that some sectors of the laity were ignorant or corrupted by the Arians who occupied the episcopal sees and ordained a heretical clergy \(^{138}\).

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135. *Ibid*.
Besides, Newman observes further on, «if there ever was an age which might dispense with the testimony of the faithful, and leave the maintenance of the truth to the pastors of the Church, it is the age in which we live» 139.

The force of Newman’s historical argument is tempered by these words which express a clear, even vehement desire of avoiding misunderstandings and soothing sensitive temperaments.

In any case, the central message of the article emerges at the end as an idea which has gone on developing throughout the essay and at last crystalized. «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» 140. Whenever, therefore, the Church considers a definition, the Christian laity will have something to say, especially in teachings directly related to matters of devotion 141.

The doctrine of the infallibility of the Church in credendo becomes with Newman a new center of attention in Catholic theology of the nineteenth century. Theologians such as M. J. Scheeben, J. B. Franzelin, F. X. Schouppe and others, who had given attention to this subject in their works on dogmatic theology, nevertheless confined themselves to affirming the existence of the passive infallibility of the faithful which has as its subject the universal Church 142. They never speak directly about the laity, which at that time was a notion more canonical than theological 143.

Newman prepares the way for the development of these principles. He tries to discover the practical, concrete manifestations of this infallibility in credendo, which he believes to consist of more than a mere theologumenon without further consequences.

With this question firmly planted in mind, his thought after 1859 seems to center on clarifying the distinction between sen-

139. Ibid., 103.
140. Ibid., 104.
141. Ibid.
sus and consensus fidelium as two notions which are related, but distinct. Both terms are used more or less interchangeably in Consulting, where they signify the special instinct of the Christian people that enables them to live and express their faith spontaneously and with precision. This expression should of course, always be sanctioned and confirmed by the Ecclesia docens.

In Consulting, the differences between sensus and consensus are for the most part ignored. Newman does distinguish the two in some of his observations, but not very clearly, because he is chiefly concerned with defining the sensus and determining its range in doctrinal matters.

The consensus is given only secondary importance, so much so that often the two terms are used indiscriminately and even seem synonymous. Actually, in Consulting Newman discusses only the sensus fidelium or the capacity to bear witness to the faith in credendo in the sense of passive inerrancy: «my paper in the Rambler is not in point —I think that paper was on the sensus not the consensus fidelium— their voice was considered as a witness, not as an authority or a judgment —I compared consulting it to consulting a barometer» 144.

We should point out here that for the sensus fidelium to be trusted as a witness to the faith, it is indispensable that the faithful really have faith and strive to live it. For Newman the sensus fidelium was very different from a simple sensus populi. And in Difficulties of Anglicans I, one observes how he contrasts the two: «... the faultiness of this passive state of mind is detected, whenever a new definition of doctrine is promulgated by the competent authority. Its immediate tendency, as exhibited in a population, will be to resist it, simply because it is new, while they on the other hand are disposed to recognize nothing but what is familiar to them; whereas a ready and easy acceptance of the apparent novelty, and a cordial acquiescence in its promulgation, may be the very evidence of a mind, which has lived, not merely in certain doctrines, but in those doctrines as revealed, —not simply in Creed, but in its Giver— or, in other words, which has lived by real faith» 145.

144. LD XXV, 172.
Newman’s words suggest on the one hand, that the sensus fidelium acts as a passive test of the truth of doctrine when the Church teaching asks it. But they also indicate that the consensus fidelium is like the external projection of the sensus, its practical unfolding. The consensus fidelium is the sensus fidelium in action. The sensus fidelium acts as a silent witness which has, nonetheless, a capacity to speak and make itself heard. When that capacity is actualized, the sensus becomes the consensus fidelium, and its expression is a doctrinal judgment within the ambit of the Church. The consensus constitutes the remote ground on which the Church teaching verifies the definibility of a Catholic truth as a dogma of faith. The sensus is, one could say, the ratification by the Christian people of what has been defined.

The consensus is important because it converts subjective, internal belief into objective, external fact, and thus prevents the doctrine of the Church from being confused with mere personal opinion. In a passage from Discussions and Arguments on Various Subjects, Newman highlights the important role of the consensus fidelium in defining Church doctrine: «the doctrines of the Church are after all not mere matters of opinion; they were not in early times mere ideas in the mind to which no one could appeal, each individual having his own, but they were external facts, quite as much as the books of Scripture; -how so? Because they were embodied in rites and ceremonies. A usage, custom, or monument, has the same kind of identity, is in the same sense common property, and admits of a common appeal, as a book» 146.

D. Newman’s Attempt to Apply His Doctrine to the Reception of Vatican I

Newman tried to explain his thought with the occasion of the definition of papal infallibility by Vatican I. In several of his letters written in 1870-1, he associates the consensus fidelium with the decisive principle securus iudicat orbis terrarum, which he explains in the following way: «Securus iudicat orbis terrarum means 'The Christian world judges with

146. DA, 241.
security’ —that is, ‘when all Christians agree together in a judgment, that is a sure warrant that its judgment is right’— In consequence it need not go back, to Scripture, or antiquity, in proof of a point in dispute, if it is in all its members of one way of judging.\textsuperscript{147}

This principle invoked by Newman would come into play most of all in the period subsequent to a conciliar definition, as that of Vatican I. And it seems that Newman translates this principle into a certain theory of popular reception. In other words, if one were to admit the full force of the dictum \textit{securus iudicat orbis terrarum} with all its implications, one would have to conclude that for a defined doctrine to be true, it must be accepted by the people. This is the idea that Newman conveys in a letter to A. Phillips de Lisle: «... if the definition is eventually received by the whole body of the faithful, as valid or as the expression of a truth, then too it will claim our assent by the force of the great dictum, ‘Securus judicat orbis terrarum’.

This indeed is the broad principle by which all acts of the rulers of the Church are ratified. But for it, we might reasonably question some of the past councils or their acts.\textsuperscript{148}

We should note, however, that Newman never sent this letter, which may indicate that he had doubts about the opinions therein expressed. In any case, Newman does not determine the extent to which defined doctrines need be ratified by the Christian people, nor does he indicate how this ratification is to be done (he does not seem to have in mind a formal act). Nor does mere popular reception of defined doctrine, even if it is of a moral character, suffice to make such a doctrine binding within the universal Church.

Additional passages of the same letter clearly show this: «if the Council [Vat. I] continues to sit, if the dissentient bishops more or less take part in it, and concur in its acts; if there is a new Pope, and he continues the policy of the present, and if the Council terminates without any reversal or modifications of the definition, or any effective movement against it on the part of the dissentients, then again there will be good reason for saying that the want of moral unanimity has not been made out.»\textsuperscript{149}

\textsuperscript{147.} \textit{LD XXV,} 215.
\textsuperscript{148.} \textit{LD XXV,} 165.
\textsuperscript{149.} \textit{LD XXV,} 165.
Newman's sermon Human Responsibility as Independent of Circumstances 150 shows in unequivocal terms just how much he opposed a simple democratic concept of the Church: "It is the very function of the Christian to be moving against the world, and to be protesting against the majority of voices. And though a doctrine such as this may be perverted into a contempt of authority, a neglect of the Church, and an arrogant reliance on self, yet there is a sense in which it is true, as every part of Scripture teaches. 'Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil', is its uniform injunction" 151.

Further on, Newman concludes: "the usurpation of an invader, and the development (as it is called) of the popular power, are... alike sins, in the sight of Him who forbids us to oppose constituted authority" 152.

All of this makes one suspect that one is examining an unfinished theory. Newman's doctrine of sensus and consensus fidelium has been clearly formulated only in its general principles. Many of its elements require further study and development which Newman was either unable or unwilling to carry out. He may have thought that not all the fragments of his doctrine of the sensus fidelium could be unified to form a single, coherent whole.

5. The Christian Freedom of the Laity in the Church

A. The True and False Freedom of the Christian in Doctrinal Matters

One view which Newman upheld repeatedly throughout his life was that, of all members of the Church, the laity had a special right to hold their own opinion in all those matters in which the hierarchy had not formally spoken. The layman had freedom not to accept certain views as binding, although he might actually accept and maintain such views as truth of the Catholic tradition. This is a subject, like so many others, in which Newman speaks of his own experience and conviction, which led him to resist any type of doctrinal «maximizing.» «In

151. Ibid., 149.
152. Ibid., 150.
belief there are... points which we may hold to be true without imposing them as necessary...» 153.

Such a point was Newman’s opinion on the infallibility of the Roman Pontiff, long before the doctrine had been defined by Vatican I. Belief in papal infallibility had obviously formed part of Newman’s religious convictions, although such belief lacked a formal dogmatic character. Because Catholics enjoyed this freedom, Newman saw nothing wrong if they did not immediately accept such a belief or if they failed to make it their own to the extent that he had.

Such an attitude was, besides, healthy for the individual Christian’s conscience and advantageous to the Church in her dealings with the intellectual world and non-Catholic religions. To present as binding truths which are not dogmas is, Newman says, the grave blunder of persons and periodicals «employed themselves by their rash language (though, of course, they did not mean it so), in unsettling the weak in faith, throwing back inquirers, and shocking the Protestant mind» 154. It is an unfortunate conduct which should be resisted.

The Christian layman has an undebatable right a fortiori not to accept as part of the Christian faith or Creed extreme views which are not. Newman tries thus to mark off and define an area for the legitimate exercise of a certain private judgment 155.

Newman is defending the freedom of the individual Christian against an alleged public opinion within the Church which would prove tyrannical, refuse to recognize freedom in dubiis, present mere personal judgments or accessory opinions as Catholic truth, and end up espousing preposterous views.

Such would be the resulting pathological state of public opinion within the Church, if left to the extremists. Newman considers Catholic public opinion a salutary phenomenon in theory,

153. Dev., 77.
155. «Moreover, that as there were probabilities which sufficed for certitude, so there were other probabilities which were legitimately adapted to create opinion; ... that accordingly we were bound to be more or less sure, on a sort of graduated scale of assent... This was the region of Private Judgment in religion; that is of a Private Judgment, not formed arbitrarily and according to one’s fancy or liking, but conscientiously, and under a sense of duty» (Apo., 31-2).
which corrects prejudices and corruptions of the truth: «it is wiser for the most part to leave these excesses (of popular devotion, for example) to the gradual operation of public opinion, that is, to the opinion of educated and sober Catholics; and this seems the healthiest way of putting them down» 156.

Public opinion, however, is a social phenomenon of several facets. It acts most of all upon the imagination; it has the force of authority, rather than reason; and concurrence in it is, not a intelligent decision, but a submission or belief 157.

Newman thinks that sometimes «the common opinion of Catholics is not sufficiently forbearing towards those who cannot in all respects follow it, and that, in the interest of conversions to the Church, it is necessary to show Protestants what they may hold when they become Catholics without being magisterially put down by the 'common opinion'» 158.

Unfortunately, «there are those among us... who for years past have conducted themselves as if no responsibility attached to wild words and overbearing deeds; who have stated truths in the most paradoxical form, and stretched principles till they were close upon snapping...» 159. They are people within the Catholic body who forget that «the field of religious thought which the duty of faith occupies, is small indeed compared with that which is open to our free, though of course to our reverent and conscientious, speculation» 160. In effect, «the faith is everywhere one and the same, but a large liberty is accorded to private judgment and inclination as regards matters of devotion» 161. It is true that respect for devotions, which Newman defines as «such religious honours as belong to the objects of our faith, and the payment of these honours» 162, should incline one to be tolerant and benevolent toward possible excesses of devout feelings, which are understandable in simple people who love and have faith: «I would not give much for that love which

158. LD XXIV, 3.
160. Ibid., 346.
161. Ibid., 28.
162. Ibid., 26.
is never extravagant...» 163. But such pious feelings and customs should never be made a formal rule to be imposed on all.

In the Church, only the hierarchy has the right to teach with authority: «I think it a usurpation, too wicked to be comfortably dwelt upon, when individuals use their own private judgment, in the discussion of religious questions, not simply «abundare in suo sensu,» but for the purpose of anathematizing the private judgment of others» 164.

Authorized theology is called to exercise a healthy interpretative and clarifying role, essential for ascertaining the meaning and scope of doctrine. «None but the Schola Theologorum is competent to determine the force of Papal and Synodal utterances, and the exact interpretation of them is a work of time» 165.

This has been the procedure traditionally followed by the Church. «Hardly has she spoken out magisterially some great principle, when she sets her theologians to work to explain her meaning in the concrete by strict interpretation of its wording, by the illustration of its circumstances, and by the recognition of exceptions, in order to make it as tolerable as possible, and the least of a temptation, to self-willed, independent, or wrongly educated minds» 166.

One should not think that Newman is advocating any type of reductionism or doctrinal minimalism here. On the contrary, he often expressed his concern over «those who have come to the Church with but an imperfect idea of its teaching and its usages, and when they knew it better have, like the disciples at Capernaum (John vi) left it again» 167.

The theological-religious group of converts associated with the Dublin Review, and especially its editor, W. G. Ward, personifies for Newman the «maximizing» tendency which he so

163. Ibid., 80.
164. Ibid., 346.
165. Ibid., 176.
166. Ibid., 321. Newman does not hesitate to enter into the theological arena to articulate his own belief about our Lady and thus contribute to this important theological work: «there just now,» he writes Pusey in Dec. 1865, «seems a call on me, under my circumstances, to avow plainly what I do and what I do not hold about the Blessed Virgin, that others may know, did they come to stand where I stand, what they would, and what they would not, be bound to hold concerning her» (Diff. II, 25).
167. LD XXIV, 96.
detested. He thought the extreme views of these men in doctrinal questions discredited them in their attempt to set themselves up as the official representatives of the Church or of English Catholics. «They are in no sense spokesmen for English Catholics, and they must not stand in the place of those who have a real title to such an office» 168. The conduct of the extremists had the grave consequence of causing division within the Catholic body. This division arose out of legitimate differences of opinion, differences which should not have been any obstacle to a complementary and peaceful coexistence of theological and devotional opinions.

It was with this in mind that Newman made the following severe reproach to Ward in May 1867: «let me observe, then, that in former years and now, I have considered the theological differences between us as unimportant in themselves, that is, such as to be simply compatible with a reception, both by you and by me, of the whole theological teaching of the Church in the widest sense of the word teaching.

«Pardon me if I say that you are making a Church within a Church, as the Novatians of old did within the Catholic pale, and as, outside the Catholic pale, the Evangelicals of the Establishment. As they talk of vital religion and vital doctrines and will not allow that their brethren know the Gospel or are Gospel preachers, unless they profess the small shibboleths of their own sect, so you are doing your best to make a party in the Catholic Church, and in St. Paul’s words are dividing Christ by exalting your opinions into dogmas... I protest then again, not against your tenets, but against what I must call your schismatical spirit. I disown your intended praise of me, viz. that I hold your theological opinions in the greatest aversion, and I pray God that I may never denounce, as you do, what the Church has not denounced» 169.

One reason in particular for Newman’s adverse feeling was the radical opinion pushed by Ward and other Catholics about papal infallibility and the temporal power of the Pope. «If I were a layman, I should say, I hold (if so) the Temporal Power to be necessary at this time, but I do not see why I need com-

mit myself to the opinion —nor have I any wish to exalt it into a quasi-dogma by assenting to it solemnly at the very time I am assenting... to real dogmas» ^170.

Newman had expressed himself in similar terms some weeks before, replying to James L. Patterson: «This is where I differ from some other persons, viz. in refusing to make my own views of doctrine necessary for a man being considered a good Catholic —I cannot endure narrowing the terms of Catholicity, as some would narrow them —I cannot abide those who would make belief in the Pope's Temporal Power (which I uphold myself) the 'Articulus stantis vel cadentis Ecclesiae'» ^171.

Newman had always looked upon the temporal power of the Roman Pontiff with moderate sympathy and defended it loyally, although not with enthusiasm. And he considered its eventual destruction a victory of the anti-Christian spirit which was dominating Europe at the time ^172. In 1854 he had written to W. Monsell: «nothing on earth should make me take the Maynooth oath 'that the Pope has neither directly nor indirectly temporal power'; not that I have any view on the subject, but because I haven't; because I won't have my private judgment as a Catholic interfered with» ^173. And in 1866, after warning that «even in secular matters it is ever safe to be on his [the Pope's] side, dangerous to be on the side of his enemies,» he explains that in that moment «the exact object of our prayers is, that the territory still his should not be violently taken from him...» and urges that «we are to pray for Rome, the see, or seat, or metropolis of St. Peter and his successors. Further, we are to pray for Rome as the seat, not only of his spiritual government, but of his temporal. We are to pray that he may continue king of Rome; that his subjects may come to a better mind...» Nevertheless, Newman concludes his sermon with a prudent

170. LD XXIII, 240.
171. Ibid., 189.
172. «I wish I was not forced to believe that a hatred of the Catholic religion is in fact at the bottom of that revolutionary spirit which at present seems so powerful in Rome. Progress in the mouth of some people —of a great many people, —means apostasy. — We are not engaged in a mere conflict between progress and reaction, modern ideas and new, philosophy and theology, but what is infinitely higher, in one sense of that never-ending conflict which is waged between our Redeemer and the Evil One, between the Church and the world» (The Pope and the Revolution (1855), in OS, 302-3, 305).
173. LD XVI, 180.
observation: «While we pray then in behalf of the pope’s temporal power, we contemplate both sides of the alternative, his retaining it, and his losing it; and we prepare ourselves both for thanksgiving and resignation, as the event may be» 174.

About his personal relations with other Catholics, who might have quite a different opinion on matters such as these, Newman could boast to H. Wilberforce in Dec. 1856: «I am the friend of persons from whom I differ in matters of faith; much more can I endure a Catholic from whom I differ in opinion and conduct» 175.

B. The Reasons for and Limits of an Opinion

On at least one occasion, Newman refers vaguely to a certain right or pretension of the faithful that the Church not narrow the range of their doctrinal freedom by defining as dogma truths which are not strictly necessary to define. «I hope still that a theological opinion will not be made unnecessarily a dogma» 176. In this statement and in others like it made around 1870, it is not easy to interpret Newman’s thought, nor to determine the exact force of his words. In any case, he seems to have discreetly forgotten about this subject shortly afterwards.

The formulation of this extraordinary principle can be traced to several factors. We are considering a theory formulated precipitously in a setting of nervous tension and anxiety, and drawn from historical data and criteria which Newman had collected and used during his initial theological training.

First of all, one observes in the brevity which is characteristic of dogmatic creeds an historical-doctrinal criterion which Newman thought he detected in the praxis of the primitive Church and which he describes in his work on the Arians of the fourth century. «If I avow my belief,» he writes in 1833, «that freedom from symbols and articles is abstractedly the highest state of Christian communion, and the peculiar privilege of the primitive Church, it is not from any tenderness towards that

174. OS, 286, 398, 310.
175. LD XVII, 472.
176. LD XXV, 195.
proud impatience of control in which many exult, as in a virtue: but first, because technicality and formalism are, in their degree, inevitable results of public confessions of faith; and next, because when confessions do not exist, the mysteries of divine truth, instead of being exposed to the gaze of the profane and uninstructed, are kept hidden in the bosom of the Church, far more faithfully than is otherwise possible; and reserved by a private teaching, through the channel of her ministers, as rewards in due measure and season, for those who are prepared to profit by them; for those, that is, who are diligently passing through the successive stages of faith and obedience. And thus, while the Church is not committed to declarations, which, most true as they are, still are daily wrested by infidels to their ruin; on the other hand, much of that mischievous fanaticism is avoided, which at present abounds from the vanity of men, who think that they can explain the sublime doctrines and exuberant promises of the Gospel, before they have yet learned to know themselves and to discern the holiness of God, under the preparatory discipline of the Law and of Natural Religion» 177.

These enlightening considerations, impregnated with a religious sense, do not lessen the force of the dogmatic principle or its formal expression in the symbol. But perhaps they give undue importance to the disciplina arcani of the Church in the first centuries.

In addition, Newman observes that acceptance of the creed of Nicea was not imposed on the laity as a condition of ecclesial communio. According to his data, adherence to the Nicene formula was demanded of the clergy only: «the test [acceptance of the Creed] has been used, not as a condition of communion, but of authority. As learning is not necessary for a private Christian, so neither is the full knowledge of the theological system. The clergy, and others in station, must be questioned as to their doctrinal views: but for the mass of laity, it is enough if they do not set up such counter statements of their own, as imply that they have systematized, and that erroneously. In the Nicene Council, the test was but imposed on the Rulers of the Church. Lay communion was not denied to such as refused to take it, provided they introduced no novelties

of their own; the anathemas or excommunications being directed solely against the Arian innovators» 178.

Without doubt, there has been a precipitous and insufficient reading of sources on Newman's part here 179. True, the so-called Nicene Creed was probably not presented to laymen, nor adherence to it demanded for ecclesial communion. But the reason is very different from that which he adduces. It is not that laymen were allowed a sort of watered-down profession of faith, but rather that the document drawn up at Nicea in 325 was not a baptismal profession of faith or a symbol, strictly speaking. It was simply an expression of the regula fidei based on the format of the baptismal symbol of Caesarea 180. It is logical, therefore, that the catechumens were not asked to profess it 181.

Finally, Newman's opinion on the supposed right of the faithful that the hierarchy define only what is necessary was foreshadowed by his teaching as an Anglican on what he called «fundamental» and «nonfundamental» truths. His theory of Tradition, formulated in the 1830s, takes the former to be those dogmatic articles which demand faith, and whose profession is necessary for communion with the Church. «Nonfundamental» truths are articles of religion which protect the fundamental truths, but their acceptance the Church leaves to the discretion of each Christian.

The tenuousness of these factors and their insufficiency to form a complete theory in a Catholic context explain why Newman hardly discusses this opinion in his writings.

Newman knew enough to realize soon that the assistance promised the Church for the exercise of her infallible magisterium must also extend to the opportuneness of her decisions 182. The very declaration of a dogmatic definition guarantees its opportuneness and necessity.

178. Ibid., 149-50.
179. Newman would later comment that his work on the Arians had many limitations and debatable points.
180. Some contemporaneous critics take exception to this opinion.
182. «For myself, I do not call it the definition of papal infallibility inopportune, for times and seasons are known to God alone...» (Diff. II, 193).
CONCLUSIONS

1. One fact which our present investigation has brought to light is that Newman had quite a well-developed idea of the laity and their role in the Church before his conversion. Newman's concept of the laity was in part inherited from Anglicanism, which had traditionally given greater responsibility to the layman than Catholicism.

In addition, Newman's recognition of the important role of the laity was facilitated by historical circumstances. The abandonment of the Anglican Church on the part of the aristocracy—both secular and ecclesiastic—forced Newman and the Tractarians to appeal to the people.

Thus the Oxford Movement, which had been originally directed toward the clergy, turned its attention increasingly toward the laity. While he understood the importance of the hierarchical element in the Church and defended it against the laicist attacks of Protestant groups, Newman tried to make the laity realize that they too constitute a living and active part of the Church.

2. However, Newman's concept of the laity cannot be reduced to a carry-over from Anglicanism or a mere product of historical circumstances. Newman owes a lot to these latter two, but he did not stop there. Rather he went ahead and formulated what must be considered a genuine theological doctrine on the laity.

This doctrine is not at first sight apparent because it is not found in a particular theological treatise, but rather is scattered throughout his writings and formulated over a considerable period of time. Even if not complete in all its aspects, this doctrine is well-defined at least in its basic lines and has substantial theological content.

3. The theological depth of Newman's idea of the laity is seen, for example, in his concept of the Church. Newman recognized the Church as the Body of Christ, which had two aspects—visible and invisible. The visible Church is formally represented by the clergy, but he laity too form an essential part of it: the laity are the matter and the hierarchy the form; both together make up the Church.
4. Newman’s insight on how the three offices of Christ—prophetic, priestly and regal—apply to all Christians represents a noteworthy theological advance for his time. From these three offices Newman derives the duty of all Christians first to know the truth, then to bear witness to the truth, and to seek the glory of God in and by means of an active life of work.

In particular, Newman draws attention to and further develops the concept of the common priesthood of the faithful. The common priesthood implies certain privileges for the faithful, such as that of giving public worship and a certain power to intercede before God. We should note that Newman never defends the common priesthood to the detriment of the ministerial priesthood; nor does the ministerial priesthood, in effect, dissolve the common priesthood of all Christians. Rather, the two priesthoods works in perfect harmony, but on different levels, and this is reflected in their respective functions.

5. Newman’s idea of the sensus fidelium is without doubt his most widely recognized contribution to our understanding of the laity. His studies on the Arian heresy of the fourth century revealed to him the doctrinal instinct of the Christian people and prepared him to deal with the crisis of the Anglican Church in his own time.

Newman would use the same findings of his study of the Arian crisis to gain a new insight into the role of the laity in definitions of faith. The faithful are not asked their opinion or advice on matters to be defined, but their belief is sought as an aspect of the evidence that the Church should take into account before deciding on a definition. Their testimony is consulted because it is an aspect of Tradition and because their consensus can be taken as a voice of the infallible Church. The consensus that Christians show is not itself infallible, but is a faithful indication or instrumentum of the judgment of the infallible Church.

6. Newman is perhaps one of the first to define the layman’s role in the Church positively, that is, as a Christian living in the world; the layman for Newman is much more than simply a non-cleric.

Newman is also one of the first to recognize and call attention to the freedom of the laity to hold their own opinions in all those matters in which the hierarchy has not formally spo-
Laymen are free not to accept certain views as binding, although they might accept and maintain such views as the truth of the Catholic tradition.

Thus Newman tried to mark off and define an area for the legitimate exercise of a certain private judgment, which is healthy for the individual Christian's conscience and advantageous to the Church in her dealings with persons of other creeds.
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