

Receptive Ecumenism and Discerning the *Sensus Fidelium*: Expanding the Categories for a Catholic Reception of Revelation

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Abstract

The benefits of the approach of “receptive ecumenism” are becoming increasingly appreciated within ecumenical circles. A primary focus is the way a particular Christian tradition can learn from another and, in a mutual exchange of gifts, receive gifts that have not been part of one’s own tradition. This essay views this dynamic in terms of recognizing differing “senses of the faith” that the Holy Spirit has brought forth within the baptized of different churches. It proposes that Catholic discernment of the *sensus fidelium*, as presupposed in *Lumen Gentium* 12, should also include the *sensus fidei* of other Christians, and that ecumenical dialogues play a crucial role in that ecclesial discernment.

Keywords

differentiated consensus, ecumenical dialogue, reception hermeneutics, receptive ecumenism, sense of the faith, sense of the faithful, *sensus fidei*, *sensus fidelium*

St. Paul reminds his Corinthian community, “What do you have that you did not receive?” (1 Cor 4:7, NRSV, used throughout). Reception goes to the heart of the process of divine revelation. Revelation—God’s self-communication—requires

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reception by faith for its realization. Such reception is not passive; it involves not only personal appropriation, but also ongoing interpretation from new contexts of the gift being received. There is always, then, a hermeneutical element involved in the ongoing reception of revelation.

The term “receptive ecumenism” highlights a dynamic of “reception” no less involved in ecumenical encounters. Ecumenical dialogues in recent decades had moved away from a comparative study of each other’s traditions to a methodology more focused on studying together the common sources of the faith, with an emphasis on receiving, now together, the foundational gift—God’s loving outreach to humanity through Christ, as first received in faith by the early church through the empowerment and enlightenment of the Holy Spirit, and handed down to us as the apostolic faith, attested in Scripture and tradition.¹ Building on that methodology, receptive ecumenism has now brought to the forefront the significance of appreciating and learning from other traditions’ receptions of the apostolic tradition that differ from one’s own.²

Just like the original attestations to divine revelation in Scripture, ongoing reception of the foundational gift of revelation (and its attestations in Scripture) is likewise only possible through the same empowering and enlightening Holy Spirit. The Spirit is what could be called “the principle of reception” in God’s revelatory process.³ In the economy of salvation, the mission of the Word is brought to realization by the mission of the Spirit. Only in the Spirit can the Word be received. Therefore, any theology of “receptive ecumenism” must be grounded in a

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1. On ecumenical dialogues since Vatican II, see Walter Kasper, *Harvesting the Fruits: Aspects of Christian Faith in Ecumenical Dialogue* (London: Continuum, 2009). For a helpful analysis of the methodologies employed in ecumenical dialogues up till 1980, see Kuncheria Pathil, *Models in Ecumenical Dialogue: A Study of the Methodological Development in the Commission on “Faith and Order” of the World Council of Churches* (Bangalore, India: Dharmaram Publications, 1981). See also Peter Bouteneff and Dagmar Heller, eds., *Interpreting Together: Essays in Hermeneutics*, Faith and Order Paper 189 (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2001).
 2. For an overview of “receptive ecumenism,” see Paul D. Murray, “Receptive Ecumenism and Catholic Learning—Establishing the Agenda,” in *Receptive Ecumenism and the Call to Catholic Learning: Exploring a Way for Contemporary Ecumenism*, ed. Paul D. Murray (Oxford: Oxford University, 2008), 5–25. See also the critical evaluation of receptive ecumenism in Antonia Pizzey, “Heart and Soul: Receptive Ecumenism as a Dynamic Development of Spiritual Ecumenism” (PhD diss., Australian Catholic University, 2016), <http://researchbank.acu.edu.au/theses/568/>. There have been three international Receptive Ecumenism symposia: Durham, UK in 2006 and 2009, and Fairfield, USA in 2014. There will a fourth symposium in Canberra, Australia, November 6–9, 2017. Throughout this essay I use the term “reception” generally in the hermeneutical sense as “interpretation.” I am not using it in the narrower canonical or juridical sense of Faith and Order Commission (FOC) studies which distinguish the *theological* notion of “recognition” from canonical or *official* “reception,” i.e., the final step toward full ecclesial communion. On the gradual clarification of this distinction in FOC studies, see Gerard Kelly, *Recognition: Advancing Ecumenical Thinking* (New York: P. Lang, 1996).
 3. See Ormond Rush, *The Eyes of Faith: The Sense of the Faithful and the Church’s Reception of Revelation* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America, 2009), 1–87.

pneumatology which gives appropriate weight to this active principle of reception, the Holy Spirit. Catholic learning from other churches then becomes at its deepest level a learning from the Holy Spirit, the Teacher of the church through history.⁴ And, the ecclesial instrument for this learning, given by the teaching Spirit, is faith's organ for understanding revelation, the gift of a "sense" of/for the faith, an ecclesial capacity that Catholics designate by the rubric *sensus fidei*.

In this article I wish to explore the epistemological function of the Holy Spirit's gift of a "sense of faith" in the ecclesial reception of revelation, and to characterize ecumenical dialogues in terms of this category, as a Catholic way of hopefully opening up a further perspective on the notions of receptive ecumenism and of Catholic learning from other churches.⁵ Conceiving our remaining differences of doctrine and ecclesial practice in terms of different "senses of the faith" would allow us to characterize ecumenical dialogue as a common discernment of receptions of revelation, which perhaps the Holy Spirit has brought forth in our traditions in diverse ways over the centuries since our separations.

Faith and the Spirit's Gift for Interpreting Revelation

The term *sensus fidei* refers to the "sense of faith" both of baptized individuals and of the church as a whole. When referring to the latter, the term *sensus fidelium* is also used, "the sense (of the faith) of the faithful."⁶ These are common terms in Catholic theology, and in some other traditions.⁷ In a Catholic understanding, the subject of those terms is all baptized individuals, including the pope and bishops: "from the bishops down to the last of the lay faithful," as Augustine puts it.⁸ The term *sensus fidelium* therefore refers not simply to the *sensus laicorum* ("the sense of the lay people"), although it includes the sense of the laity. Among the *fideles*, bishops functioning as the magisterium are always subject to the Word of God and to the *sensus ecclesiae*, the sense of the whole church, which is the primary recipient of revelation.

The *sensus fidei* is a dimension of theological faith. Faith is the human reception of divine revelation. Along with faith's capacity to respond in love to God's loving

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4. I take this term "Catholic learning" from the title of the first conference: "Receptive Ecumenism and the Call to Catholic Learning."
 5. This essay is a development of a keynote paper delivered at the second conference on Receptive Ecumenism at Durham, UK, in January 2009. That paper was an attempt to expand on ideas first sketched out in Rush, *The Eyes of Faith*, 249–51.
 6. For a fuller examination of these issues, see *ibid.*, 63–70.
 7. The category of the *sensus fidelium* features in some ecumenical statements, e.g., the Agreed Statement by the Second Anglican–Roman Catholic International Commission, *The Gift of Authority: Authority in the Church III* (September 3, 1998), 29–31, 43, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/documents/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_12051999_gift-of-authority_en.html.
 8. Augustine, *De Praed. Sanct.* (*Predestination of Saints*) 14, 27 (Migne, *PL* 44.980). This text is quoted in *Lumen Gentium* (November 21, 1964), 12, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html (hereafter cited as *LG*).

outreach comes a cognitive capacity to understand, to make sense of, what is communicated. The deeply personal act of faith, of course, involves much more than cognitive and interpretive elements. I focus here more narrowly on the cognitive and interpretive elements of faith because Vatican II's discussion of the *sensus fidei*, as I will soon examine, takes place within its discussion of the teaching office of the church, the office which deals more specifically with the cognitive and interpretive aspects of faith.

Faith, according to the classic distinction of Augustine,⁹ and as followed in the Faith and Order Apostolic Faith Project, is both (1) a personal committed relationship with God (*fides qua creditur*) and (2) the beliefs which name the content communicated within that personal encounter (*fides quae creditur*).¹⁰ Within both dimensions, there is an interpretive (i.e., hermeneutical) dynamic at the heart of faith which the terms *sensus fidei* and *sensus fidelium* name. We are always seeking to understand and "make sense" of faith, and we believe that the Holy Spirit endows baptized individuals and the whole church with a capacity to do so. "Faith seeking understanding" in theology is merely the impulse of the *sensus fidei* at work in theologians, but no less at work in all believers.

The Catholic literature on the topic generally highlights two distinct but interrelated aspects of that interpretive dynamic. Bestowed by the Holy Spirit within the gift

9. See Augustine, *De Trinitate* 13.2.5.

10. For an exploration of the distinction, see Juan Alfaro, "The Dual Aspect of Faith: Entrusting Oneself to God and Acceptance of the Christian Message," in "Dogma," ed. Edward Schillebeeckx and Boniface Willems, *Concilium*, no. 21 (1967): 27–33. On the ecumenical consensus regarding the usefulness of the twofold distinction (if not yet unity in the faith in the sense of a common *fides quae*), see the "Preliminary Working Definition" of "faith" in the WCC's *Apostolic Faith Project*: "The term 'faith' indicates at the same time a decisive act and a continuing attitude of believing (*fides qua creditur*) as well as a set of beliefs and convictions (*fides quae creditur*). The Old and New Testaments witness that faith in God is expressed by an existential, personal and communal act and attitude of acceptance, decision, trust, confidence, confessing, hope, and obedience. This *fides qua* can never be without or separated from the content of faith (*fides quae*). Otherwise the act of faith would be an empty or a purely self-generated act. The content of faith is determined by the One towards whom it is directed. The *fides quae* can be expressed in a great plurality of forms, ranging from short biblical affirmations such as 'Jesus is Lord' to massive theological expositions." Faith and Order Commission, "The Apostolic Faith in the Scriptures and in the Early Church: Report of a Faith and Order Consultation Held in Rome, October 1–8, 1983," in *The Roots of Our Common Faith: Faith in the Scriptures and in the Early Church*, ed. Hans-Georg Link, Faith and Order Paper 119 (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1984), 9–20 at 20. Regarding the ecumenical consensus concerning faith, Wolfgang Beinert asserts, "Corresponding to the fundamental agreement of the major church confessions on the understanding of revelation, there also exists a basic consensus in the understanding of faith as *fides qua*. This does not apply to the description of faith with regard to its contents: here the visible unity in the one faith is still a goal to be achieved." Wolfgang Beinert, "Faith," in *Handbook of Catholic Theology*, ed. Wolfgang Beinert and Francis Schüssler Fiorenza (New York: Crossroad, 1995), 249–53 at 251.

of *fides*, the *sensus fidei* is both (1) the *sensus* or capacity for the understanding, interpretation, and application of revelation, and (2) the interpretation that results from the exercise of that interpretive *sensus*. In the first meaning (as an organ of faith, like some “sixth sense”), it is a sense *for* the faith;¹¹ in the second meaning, it is a sense *of* the faith.¹² In the first meaning, it is an *ability to interpret* the faith; in the second meaning, it is a particular *interpretation* of the faith. In the first meaning, it is more (but not exclusively) a dimension of faith as *fides qua creditur*; in the second meaning, it is more (but not exclusively) a dimension of faith as *fides quae creditur*. In the first meaning, it functions as an engine driving the living tradition; in the second meaning, it constitutes the diverse traditions that are generated by the tradition process. In the first meaning, it is the common organ for recognition or perception of what is true to the apostolic faith; in the second meaning, it is the diverse meanings perceived in the ongoing interpretation of the one apostolic faith.

The origins of the *sensus fidelium* lie in the post-Pentecost experience of the early church to now understand—albeit, in a mirror darkly (see 1 Cor 13:12)—what has been given in Christ. Without using the actual phrase *sensus fidei*, the New Testament alludes to a capacity for perceiving the faith that comes from the Holy Spirit.¹³ According to Salvador Pié-Ninot, “an effort to base the *sensus fidei* theologically finds in the New Testament clear testimonials to the reality of *an organ of faith and its understanding*, the work of the Spirit, in each of the baptized, as well as in the entire church.”¹⁴ As the ecclesial capacity for the ongoing reception of the Christ event, the

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11. Here Salvador Pié-Ninot’s definition captures the nuance: “a quality of the subject, upon whom the grace of faith, love and the gifts of the Holy Spirit confers a capacity to perceive the truth of faith and to discern what is contrary to the same.” Salvador Pié-Ninot, “*Sensus Fidei*,” in *Dictionary of Fundamental Theology*, ed. René Latourelle and Rino Fisichella (Middlegreen, Slough, UK: St Paul, 1994), 992–95 at 992. See also J.-M. R. Tillard, “*Sensus Fidelium*,” *One in Christ* 11 (1987), 2–29; and the summary in J.-M. R. Tillard, “*Consensus Fidelium*,” in *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement*, ed. Nicolas Lossky and et al., 2nd ed. (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2002), 250–51.
 12. Herbert Vorgrimler’s definition captures this second nuance: “The term ‘*sensus fidei*’ designates a special kind of knowledge, springing from faith and embracing its fundamental features . . . As the New Testament and a long tradition testify, *everyone* who believes in God’s revelation has this sense of faith. First of all therefore, it is the individual consciousness, ‘illuminated’ by faith and hence by God himself.” Herbert Vorgrimler, “From *Sensus Fidei* to *Consensus Fidelium*,” in “The Teaching Authority of the Believers,” ed. Johann Baptist Metz and Edward Schillebeeckx, *Concilium*, no. 180 (1985): 3–11 at 3. Vorgrimler goes on to state that *sensus fidei*, “in a wider sense, refers to the collective faith-consciousness and so is also called *sensus fidelium*, the ‘sense of the faithful’.”
 13. For example, 1 Cor 2:9–16; 2 Cor 3:12–18; 2 Tim 1:13–14; Col 1:9–10; 2:2–3; Eph 1:17–19; 3–5; 3–16, 19; Jn 14:25–26; 1 Jn 2:20–21, 27. For an overview of the New Testament witness to this reality in the individual and community specifically in terms of *sensus fidei*, see Walter Kirchschräger, “Was das Neue Testament über den Glaubenssinn der Gläubigen sagt,” in *Mitsprache im Glauben? Vom Glaubenssinn der Gläubigen*, ed. Günther Koch (Würzburg: Echter, 1993), 7–24.
 14. Pié-Ninot, “*Sensus Fidei*,” 923. Emphasis added.

sensus fidei can, retrospectively, be seen to be the generator of the apostolic tradition after Pentecost, as Christian communities attempt to live out and pass on the living Gospel in new contexts. This *sensus fidei* is active in the communities and individual writers of the New Testament, bringing forth their diverse interpretations of revelation; and it is this *sensus fidei* that is the primary organ for recognition in those early centuries of what is “true to the faith” in the selection of the diverse canonical writings during the canonization process. This communal *sensus* knows which among these diverse interpretations are false or true to what has originally been given in Christ. Thus, the whole traditioning process and Scripture are products of the communal *sensus fidelium*. Indeed, to use an expression now common in ecumenical circles, the ecclesial canon (as the common benchmark of the faith), which Scripture became, could well be described as a “differentiated” *con-sensus fidelium*.¹⁵

This activity of the communal *sensus fidelium* perdures in the Christian community of faith throughout history in its ongoing reception of the apostolic tradition. Any faithful reception of this apostolic faith is always necessarily by means of the very same ecclesial organ of discernment and recognition which had produced the apostolic tradition in the first place. In this way, there is a *conspiratio* through time between the community of faith and its principle of reception, the Holy Spirit, by means of the Spirit’s gift, the *sensus fidei*. Through its exercise, “the Holy Spirit is the Church’s living memory.”¹⁶

Expanding Catholic Discernment of “the Faith”

Within the Catholic theological discipline of foundational theology, or fundamental theology, the subdiscipline of “theological epistemology” (*Theologische Erkenntnislehre*) is, to quote Wolfgang Beinert, “the discipline that treats the character and methodology of theological knowledge.”¹⁷ Its two guiding questions, according to Beinert, are: (1) “how can God’s revelation be mediated to the faith of contemporary human beings?” and (2) “how do we know what God has

15. The term “differentiated consensus” is now regularly used to describe the methodology of the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* (1999), though the declaration doesn’t use that exact phrase. It does speak of having achieved a “consensus on the basic truths,” despite “remaining differences” and “differing explications.” See The Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Church, *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* (1999), 5, 14, 40, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/documents/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_31101999_cath-luth-joint-declaration_en.html. It can be argued that this term describes the nature of the New Testament canon; on such unity and diversity, see James D. G. Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament: An Inquiry into the Character of Earliest Christianity*, 2nd ed. (London: SCM, 1990).

16. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1099, http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_INDEX.HTM.

17. Wolfgang Beinert, “Theological Epistemology,” in Beinert and Fiorenza, *Handbook of Catholic Theology*, 693–96 at 693.

communicated?”¹⁸ Since Vatican II, a specifically Roman Catholic theological epistemology generally configures its task in terms of the interrelationship between five classic factors which are all necessarily involved in contemporary ecclesial reception of revelation: Scripture, tradition, the *sensus fidelium*, theology, and the magisterium.¹⁹ (Sources and factors such as the liturgy, experience, reason, culture, context, etc., are variously treated as realities within the process of tradition, either as elements within the methodology of theology itself, or as factors within the dynamism of the *sensus fidelium*).

Whatever may be said of the current intra-Catholic de facto reception process among the *sensus fidelium*, theology, and the magisterium (to which I will return later), such a way of configuring the theological-epistemological task does not have explicit categories for including or demanding attention to the doctrinal perspectives and practices of other churches. The results of ecumenical dialogues, both the personal dialogic encounters and the consensus statements that emerge from them, seem to be *formally* extraneous or indeed superfluous to any Roman Catholic fundamental theology of ecclesial reception of revelation, notwithstanding the *factual* influence of ecumenical dialogue on Catholic theology and the practical involvement of theologians in the dialogues. However, to place such dialogues solely under the category of “theology” alone would be too restrictive.

I propose that, in this interim period of separation on the way to full visible communion, the theological-epistemological category of *sensus fidelium* is, for Catholics at least, perhaps the most appropriate and comprehensive category for giving full theological weight to the doctrinal perspectives and practices of other Christians, certainly in terms of a Catholic fundamental theology. Such a theological exploration at least might open up new perspectives for us Catholics on “Catholic learning,” and it might just constitute a significant cornerstone of what Kasper calls “the building-site of the future structure of the church,”²⁰ which our ecumenical endeavors can be.

Any Catholic theology of “a sense of the faith” presupposes a particular theology of faith itself. That faith is a gift of the Holy Spirit has long been asserted by the church, as affirmed by the Second Council of Orange in 529,²¹ cited by both

18. *Ibid.*, 695.

19. For example, see Wolfgang Beinert, “Theologische Erkenntnislehre,” in *Glaubenszugänge: Lehrbuch der Katholischen Dogmatik*, ed. Wolfgang Beinert (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1995), 1:47–197; Wolfgang Beinert, *Kann man dem Glauben trauen? Grundlagen theologischer Erkenntnis* (Regensburg: Friedrich Pustet, 2004).

20. Walter Kasper, “‘Credo Unam Sanctam Ecclesiam’: The Relationship between the Catholic and the Protestant Principles in Fundamental Ecclesiology,” in *Receptive Ecumenism and the Call to Catholic Learning: Exploring a Way for Contemporary Ecumenism*, ed. Paul D. Murray (Oxford: Oxford University, 2008), 79–88 at 86.

21. “It is through the infusion and inspiration of the Holy Spirit that we believe, will or are able to do all these things as is required.” Council of Orange II, canon 7, in H. Denzinger and A. Schoenmetzer, ed., *Enchiridion Symbolorum Definitionum et Declarationum de Rebus Fidei et Morum* (Freiburg: Herder, 1965), 376–77 (hereafter cited as DS), translated in Jacques Dupuis and Josef Neuner, eds., *The Christian Faith in the Doctrinal Documents of the Catholic Church*, 7th rev. and enl. ed. (New York: Alba House, 2001), nos. 1918–19.

Vatican I²² and Vatican II on the matter.²³ Vatican II also asserts that the Holy Spirit not only bestows faith, but also bestows upon baptized individuals and the whole People of God a supernatural sense of the faith. The key Vatican II text is *Lumen Gentium* 12, which uses the phrase *supernaturalis sensus fidei totius populi*, “the supernatural sense of the faith of the whole people,” with the term “supernatural” designating the divine origin of this sense of the faith:²⁴

The holy people of God shares also in Christ’s prophetic office ... The entire body of the faithful, anointed as they are by the Holy One, cannot err in matters of believing [*in credendo falli nequit*]. They manifest this special property by means of the whole people’s supernatural sense of the faith [*supernaturali sensu fidei totius populi*] when “from the Bishops down to the last of the lay faithful” they show universal consensus in matters of faith and morals. That sense of the faith is aroused and sustained by the Spirit of truth. It is exercised under the guidance of the sacred teaching authority, in faithful and respectful obedience to which the people of God *receives* that which is not just the word of men but truly the word of God. Through it, the people of God *adheres* unwaveringly to the faith given once and for all to the saints, *penetrates* it more deeply with right thinking, and *applies* it more fully in its life.²⁵

I have earlier indicated the two interrelated ways in which the *sensus fidei*, both in individuals and in the community, is generally spoken about: (1) as a capacity or organ of faith for understanding, interpreting and applying faith, and (2) as the diverse senses or interpretations or applications which are made of the faith. *Lumen Gentium* 12 here implicitly takes up those two dimensions with the four verbs it uses towards the end of the paragraph just quoted, when it states that this sense of the faith enables the whole body of the faithful to *receive*, to *adhere to*, to *penetrate* and to *apply* revelation to daily life.

22. Vatican I, Dogmatic Constitution on the Catholic Faith, *Dei Filius* (April 24, 1870), chap. 3., DS 3010, trans. Dupuis and Neuner, *The Christian Faith*, no. 120. See also <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/creeds2.v.ii.i.html>.

23. Vatican II’s teaching on faith is to be found in *Dei Verbum* 5: “‘The obedience of faith’ (Rom 13:26; see 1:5; 2 Cor 10:5–6) ‘is to be given to God who reveals, an obedience by which man commits his whole self freely to God, offering the full submission of intellect and will to God who reveals,’ and freely assenting to the truth revealed by Him. To make this act of faith, the grace of God and the interior help of the Holy Spirit must precede and assist, moving the heart and turning it to God, opening the eyes of the mind and giving ‘joy and ease to everyone in assenting to the truth and believing it.’ To bring about an ever deeper understanding of revelation the same Holy Spirit constantly brings faith to completion by His gifts.” *Dei Verbum* (November 18, 1965), 5, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651118_dei-verbum_en.html. Vatican II is here first quoting Vatican I’s *Dei Filius*, chap. 3 and, secondly, the Council of Orange II, canon 7 (DS 377).

24. On the “supernaturality” of faith, see Avery Dulles, *The Assurance of Things Hoped For: A Theology of Christian Faith* (New York: Oxford University, 1994), 224–26.

25. *Lumen Gentium* (November 21, 1964), 12, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html (hereafter cited as *LG*), translation modified, emphasis added.

It is an ongoing task of theologians and the magisterium to attend to this lived faith of the whole church and to bring its diversity to expression and synthesis. Of course, for Catholics, these diffuse and diverse senses of the faithful are to be tested, discerned, and judged by theologians and ultimately the magisterium as to whether any particular sense of the faith brings to new expression the one apostolic faith, “the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints” (Jude 3). However, that theologians and the magisterium must attend to the *sensus fidelium* is clearly implied as their divinely entrusted duty, because through this “supernatural sense of the faith of the whole people,” according to *Lumen Gentium* 12, the church is given an *infallibilitas in credendo*, an infallibility in believing, that is, an indefectible adhering to the God reaching out in love to them in Christ through the Spirit. *Lumen Gentium* later affirms in article 25 that the magisterium alone possesses an infallibility in teaching (*infallibilitas in docendo*); however, without clarifying the relationship between these two forms of infallibility (“in believing” and “in teaching”). It leaves the work of such a theological synthesis to theologians. But I must leave discussion of that issue for another time.

Can what is affirmed here in *Lumen Gentium* 12 of baptized Catholics regarding a *sensus fidei* (a sense for the faith) also be affirmed of their fellow baptized in other churches? Certainly it is true, as John Burkhard remarks, that the intended reference of the bishops at Vatican II, when formulating the teaching on the *sensus fidei totius populi* in *Lumen Gentium* 12, was to the *universitas fidelium* of the Catholic Church.²⁶ However, attention must be given here to appropriate hermeneutical principles.²⁷ The need for a new synthesis on this matter emerges when we move beyond an exclusive hermeneutics of the authors (a reconstruction of authorial intention) and an exclusive focus on this particular text (*LG* 12), to include a hermeneutics of the text, by attending to both an *intra*-textual reading (of *Lumen Gentium* as a whole) and an *inter*-textual reading across all the council documents, all in the light of new questions addressed to the texts which have emerged in the process of the council’s reception over the last fifty years (a hermeneutics of the receivers).

Intra-textually (i.e., reading within *Lumen Gentium*), the bishops’ restriction in *Lumen Gentium* 12 of the *sensus fidei* to the members of the Catholic Church stands in tension with the affirmation in *Lumen Gentium* 8 that, although the church of Christ “subsists in” the Catholic Church, “many elements of sanctification and of truth” are

26. See John J. Burkhard, “*Sensus Fidei*: Recent Theological Reflection (1990–2001); Part I,” *Heythrop Journal* 46 (2005): 450–75 at 462, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2265.2005.00268.x>.

27. Historical reconstruction of “authorial intention” (through a hermeneutics of the authors) is but one moment in a comprehensive hermeneutic for interpreting the council; there must also be incorporated a hermeneutics of the texts themselves and a hermeneutics of their reception from diverse times and places. See Ormond Rush, *Still Interpreting Vatican II: Some Hermeneutical Principles* (New York: Paulist, 2004); Ormond Rush, “Towards a Comprehensive Interpretation of the Council and Its Documents,” in *50 Years On: Probing the Riches of Vatican II*, ed. David G. Schultenover (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2015), 35–60.

to be found outside the confines of the Catholic Church.²⁸ Similarly, intra-textually, the restriction in *Lumen Gentium* 12 of the *sensus fidei* to the Catholic Church stands in tension with what is affirmed three articles later, in *Lumen Gentium* 15, which recognizes the baptism of other Christians and, implicitly, their faith through the Holy Spirit.²⁹ Furthermore, an *inter-textual* reading across all the council documents highlights that *Unitatis Redintegratio* also explicitly recognizes the baptism of other churches: “all who have been justified by faith in baptism are members of Christ’s body, and have a right to be called Christian, and so are correctly accepted as brothers by the children of the Catholic Church.”³⁰ It also lists among the “significant elements and endowments” bestowed on the baptized of other churches: “the life of grace; faith, hope and charity, with the other interior gifts of the Holy Spirit” (*UR* 3).

What is meant by “faith” here? Using Augustine’s classic distinction, is it faith as *fides qua creditur* (faith as a committed relationship), or as *fides quae creditur* (faith as beliefs, as defined in doctrine), or both? It is at least to be understood as *fides qua creditur*. However, it is clearly not a Catholic recognition of a unity in all aspects of the faith as beliefs, in the sense of a common *fides quae creditur*, since *Lumen Gentium* 15 begins, “The Church recognizes that in many ways she is linked with those who, being baptized, are honored with the name of Christian, though they do not profess the faith in its entirety or do not preserve unity of communion with the successor of Peter.” But, despite the remaining differences regarding the faith as *fides quae*, these texts must be interpreted as affirming of other Christians that the Holy Spirit and the Spirit’s gift of faith as *fides qua* is given them in baptism.

Therefore, what the Catholic Church affirms of baptized Catholics regarding the gift of the organ of a *sensus fidei* (which accompanies the gift of *fides qua*, as implied in *LG* 12) is likewise to be affirmed of all baptized Christians. They too possess this *sensus fidei* and, consequently, their senses of the faith must be included in any determination by Catholics of the *sensus fidelium*. Moreover, it follows that other Christians participate, in some way or other, in the *infallibilitas in credendo* (infallibility in

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28. On the significance of the phrase “subsist in,” see Francis A. Sullivan, “The Significance of the Vatican II Declaration That the Church of Christ ‘Subsists in’ the Roman Catholic Church,” in *Vatican II Assessment and Perspectives: Twenty-Five Years After (1962–1987)*, ed. René Latourelle (New York: Paulist, 1989), 2:272–87. For a contrary interpretation by Karl Becker, and Francis Sullivan’s response to Becker, see Karl J. Becker, “The Church and Vatican II’s ‘Subsistit in’ Terminology,” *Origins*, January 19, 2006, 514–22; Francis A. Sullivan, “A Response to Karl Becker, S.J., on the Meaning of *Subsistit In*,” *Theological Studies* 67 (2006): 395–409, <https://doi.org/10.1177/004056390606700207>. On the ecumenical implications of this verb, see also Johannes Willebrands, “Vatican II’s Ecclesiology of Communion,” *One in Christ* 23 (1987): 179–91.
29. “They are consecrated by baptism, in which they are united with Christ . . . Likewise we can say that in some real way they are joined with us in the Holy Spirit, for to them too He gives His gifts and graces whereby He is operative among them with His sanctifying power” (*LG* 15).
30. *Unitatis Redintegratio* (November 21, 1964), 3, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19641121_unitatis-redintegratio_en.html (hereafter cited as *UR*).

believing) which is affirmed of the whole People of God in *Lumen Gentium* 12, by virtue of their possessing the *sensus fidei*. The issue of “to what extent,” because of a lack of consensus regarding the *fides quae*, is one for further theological exploration by ecumenical theologians. But, regardless of the scope and degree of that infallibility in believing, any determination of the *sensus fidelium* by Catholics necessarily must include attention to the senses of the faith of other Christians brought forth in them by the Spirit’s organ of faith, the *sensus fidei*.

Determination of the *sensus fidelium* and its diffuse and diverse expressions, of course, is somewhat problematic; it is a spiritual reality that always requires discernment. This is true *within* any particular tradition. Within the Catholic Church, as the title of an article by Karl Rahner highlights, there is often discrepancy between “what the church officially teaches and what the people actually believe.”³¹ Therefore, however wide the net is to be thrown in sourcing the *sensus fidelium*, whether within the Roman Catholic communion or beyond it, the *sensus fidelium* is always a kaleidoscopic reality to be determined, discerned, tested, evaluated, judged, and synthesized against the norm of Scripture and tradition.

From a strictly Catholic perspective, the determination of the *sensus fidelium* within the Catholic communion might be said to involve various sources. The Catholic literature differs as to whom should be included and excluded in the determination of the *sensus fidelium*. We could categorize those in terms of primary and secondary sources. Among Catholics, the *primary* source would include only Catholic Christians who are committed disciples of Christ, availing themselves regularly of the sacraments and participating in the communal life of the faith community. In the United States, for example, these would constitute around 24 percent of Catholics who attend mass every Sunday.³² Do they alone express the *sensus fidelium*?³³ A *secondary* source, however, should be those who don’t regularly avail themselves of the sacraments, and have varying commitment to the church, ranging from apathetic to hostile, but whose *fides qua* may not be severed and whose *sensus fidei* may well provide a voice from the Holy Spirit for the church. In the USA, these could constitute around 76 percent of nominal Catholics. Is their sense of the faith to be ignored? But I must leave to another forum such specific questions concerning the difficult issue of discerning the *sensus fidelium* within a particular tradition.

My point here in this article is that there is a further source which needs to be named in a Roman Catholic determination of the *sensus fidelium*. And that is the

31. Karl Rahner, “What the Church Officially Teaches and What the People Actually Believe,” in *Theological Investigations*, vol. 22 (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1991), 165–75.

32. See “Frequently Requested Church Statistics,” *Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate*, <http://cara.georgetown.edu/frequently-requested-church-statistics/>.

33. The International Theological Commission’s “*Sensus Fidei* in the Life of the Church,” would seem to restrict “authentic manifestations of the *sensus fidei*” to this group. See “*Sensus Fidei* in the Life of the Church” (2014), 87–126, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_20140610_sensus-fidei_en.html (hereafter cited in text as *SFLC*).

senses of the faith perceived by other Christians not in full communion with the Catholic Church.³⁴ In this “interim situation,” and given the five classic factors of contemporary Catholic theological epistemology, this source might be characterized, for us Catholics in this interim period, as *ancillary* for the determination of the *sensus fidelium*. My naming it an ancillary source is not to downplay its theological weight, but simply to situate it within the current situation of ecclesial separation and within the categories of current Catholic theological epistemologies.

The senses of the faith of such baptized Christians in real, yet imperfect communion with the Catholic Church constitute a *locus theologicus* in the Catholic Church’s ongoing reception of revelation. While still admitting the need for such a theological source to be discerned more closely, within this *locus theologicus* is to be found genuine receptions of the Gospel expressed in the doctrine, life, and worship of Christian communities of faith outside of full communion with the Roman Catholic Church since the divisions of schism and reformations. Across those centuries, the work of the Holy Spirit by means of the supernatural *sensus fidei*, given with the gift of faith, has not ceased in their midst, and continues to be at work among them, bringing forth responses to divine revelation through doctrinal formulations, liturgical rituals, spiritualities, practices and exercise of ministry which may well be more faithful to the divine loving outreach, and which the Holy Spirit may well be inviting and challenging Catholics to also receive. Like all expressions of the *sensus fidelium*, these too constitute a kaleidoscopic reality to be discerned. The privileged instruments for such discernment, from a Catholic point of view, are our formal ecumenical dialogues. They constitute de facto instruments for the discernment and determination of the *sensus fidelium* of the whole body of Christian believers.

Openings

There are many issues I have not addressed here, such as the specific criteria for the discernment of genuine senses of the faith. But employing the rubric of *sensus fidei* for conceiving faith’s organ of recognition for determining what is true or false to the faith, and characterizing ecumenical dialogues as instruments for the determination of the wider *sensus fidelium*, has certain advantages which may perhaps open up further perspectives on the notion of receptive ecumenism and its

34. A few Catholic scholars have already raised the issue of whether the determination of the *sensus fidelium* by the Catholic Church should now include the attention to the doctrines of other churches. See, for example, Patrick J. Hartin, “*Sensus Fidelium*: A Roman Catholic Reflection on Its Significance for Ecumenical Thought,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 28 (1991): 74–87, esp. 82–84; James L. Heft, “‘*Sensus Fidelium*’ and the Marian Dogmas,” *One in Christ* 28 (1992): 106–25; Rush, *The Eyes of Faith*, 249–51. However, Hartin and Heft do not develop this point in terms of ecumenical dialogues as the instruments for attending to this wider *sensus fidelium*. The International Theological Commission has recently acknowledged the role of ecumenical dialogues in the discernment of the *sensus fidelium* of all believers; see *SFLC* 86 (ii).

corresponding notion, of ecclesial learning. In conclusion, there are at least seven advantages to the proposal, as I see it:

The first is *methodological*. By employing “reception” as its integrating category, it begins with the heart of what we hold in common, the original *double* gift exchange and its dynamic of reception, that is, (1) the foundational gift of God’s loving self-bestowal to us through Jesus Christ, and (2) the foundational gift of the Holy Spirit who enables human beings to receive that gift in faith, to give of themselves to God in return, and to bring their faith to expression in doctrine, life, and worship.

The second is *pneumatological*. It seeks a theology of receptive ecumenism that is explicitly pneumatological, in a way that balances the mission of the Word and the mission of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of reception of the Word.

The third is *eschatological*. Highlighting the pneumatological source of the gift of faith brings to the fore the eschatological dimension of Christian truth: “When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth” (John 16:13). Together we are being led to “all the truth” by the Holy Spirit we hold in common.

The fourth is *pisteological* (with its focus on a theology of faith [Gk, *pistis*], and on the nature of the church as a community of faith, i.e., a community of reception). The proposal seeks to expand on that first word in the notion *receptive* ecumenism, by focusing on faith as the reception of revelation, and especially upon faith’s organ for understanding and interpretation, the *sensus fidei*, given to all the baptized by the Holy Spirit with *fides qua*. It is this *sensus fidei* that constitutes the organ of recognition in ecumenical dialogue.

The fifth is *hermeneutical*. Focusing on the hermeneutical dimension of “making sense of the faith” (as faith continually seeks understanding) highlights the interpretive dimension of all practices and doctrines. As Aquinas reminds us regarding the *fides quae*, all articles of faith ultimately point to the *res*, the God reaching out to us in Christ through the Spirit.³⁵ Beliefs, as naming the content of God’s self-gift, are always interpretations of that foundational reality from diverse contexts.

The sixth is its *heuristic* possibilities. It may just open up new perspectives on receptive ecumenism and ecclesial learning through dialogue. For example, framing the debate concerning our remaining differences in terms of differentiated interpretations or senses of the faith, and highlighting the pneumatological origin of that differentiation and diversity, may also offer a basis for then framing a theology of a differentiated *consensus fidelium*, as one way of further developing the “differentiated consensus” methodology of the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*.³⁶

35. Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* 2–2, q. 1, a. 2, ad 2: “for the act of the believer does not terminate in the proposition [*enuntiabile*] but in the reality [signified by the proposition],” as in Avery Dulles, *The Assurance of Things Hoped For*, 193. See also Aquinas, *ST*, 2–2, q. 1, a. 6: “Articulus [*fidei*] est perceptio divinae veritatis tendens in ipsam [*veritatem*].”

36. See footnote 15. The methodology of “differentiated consensus” appears to have been endorsed in the past by the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, in its official response to the World Council of Churches’ document *The Nature and Mission of the Church*: “A Catholic Contribution toward Revising *The Nature and Mission of the*

Finally, the seventh is *pedagogical*, related to a deeper understanding of Catholic learning and conversion. From a Catholic perspective, a reflexive dynamic would here be hoped for. By bringing to the fore the ecumenical significance of the category of *sensus fidelium*, our own Catholic structures might just be challenged. If Catholic learning *ab extra* can be conceived in terms of the *sensus fidelium* coming from outside the Roman Catholic communion, there might just be stimulus given to a Catholic learning *ab intra* with regard to the reception of the *sensus fidelium* within the Catholic communion, and thereby challenge the de facto lack of institutional structures for facilitating reception between the *sensus fidelium*, theology, and the magisterium in the teaching office of the Catholic Church today. On this, we Catholics have much to learn.

Author biography

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Church" (January 14, 2008). In an explicit reference to "differentiated consensus," the official Catholic response states, "This method allows one to affirm that, on the basis of an acknowledged agreement in the profession of fundamental truths of the Christian faith, differing affirmations, which do not directly contradict one another and which may even complement one another, are possible according to the unique sensitivities of various theological traditions. Such diverse, yet non-contradictory, affirmations are able, nevertheless, to reflect the same Christian faith." This official response has not yet been published; I take this translation from Peter De Mey, "The Missing Link between *The Nature and Mission of the Church* (2005) and *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* (2013): An Assessment of the Impact of 'A Catholic Contribution toward Revising *The Nature and Mission of the Church*' (2008)," *Exchange* 44 (2015): 250–69 at 252, <https://doi.org/10.1163/1572543x-12341367>. Also on "differentiated consensus," see Hervé Legrand, "Receptive Ecumenism and the Future of Ecumenical Dialogues: Privileging Differentiated Consensus and Drawing Its Institutional Consequences," in *Receptive Ecumenism and the Call to Catholic Learning: Exploring a Way for Contemporary Ecumenism*, ed. Paul D. Murray (Oxford: Oxford University, 2008), 385–98; Ryan Andersen, "Hermeneutics and the Differentiated Consensus of the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification," *Toronto Journal of Theology* 22 (2006) 181–94, <https://doi.org/10.3138/tjt.22.2.181>.