

Sensus Fidei as a Gift of the Holy Spirit to the Church*

The proclamation of the Marian Dogmas of the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption triggered a deeper theological reflection on the following topics: *sensus fidei* the people of God in the development of dogmas¹. An additional motive for reflection on this subject was ecclesiological renewal, especially related to the theology of the laity. This concerns the relationship between *sensus fidei* and the prophetic function of the baptised.

On the one hand, in a strict sense *sensus fidei*, being the property of the subject endowed with the grace of faith, love and the gifts of the Holy Spirit, makes it capable of perceiving the truth of faith and of ascertaining its truthfulness. The above view results from the analysis of the act of faith in a believer. On the other hand, we meet with reality *sensus fidelium*, which tries to express the “state” of beliefs of believers in relation to a specific doctrine and leads towards *consensus on fidelium* whether *universus ecclesiae sensus*². Intima spiritualium

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¹ We only note here that the theological thought, especially in the first half of the 20th century, explaining the ways that dogma developed, oscillated, to say the least, around *via speculativa* or *via afectiva*. The theologians who attached great importance to *senas fidei* in the development of dogmas include: F. Main-Sola, M. Blondel, J.V. Bainvel, L. de Grandmaison, P. Rousselot, L. Charlier, R. Draguet, A. Garde il. In addition, mention should be made of D. Koster, who emphasized, rather in too extreme a way, that only *senus fidei* can guarantee that the truth is in Revelation. P. Schultes had already noticed that the sense of faith can be the following “*vis impellens ad definitively nem*,” but not its criterion. G. Filograssi, who made a significant contribution to the definition of the dogma of the Assumption, pointed out that “*Via speculativa mainspossidet momentum aut saltem magis visis – bile quam via sensus fidei; haec nititur experientiis subiectivis et personalibus, illa offert rationes obiectivas quas omnes examinare valent.*” G. Filograssi, *Traditio divino-apostolica et Assumption. M. Virginis*, “Gregorianum” 30 (1949), 470.

² DS 1637.

rerum quam experiuntur intelligentia, as *sensus fidei* is described by the Second Vatican Council³ has a clear meaning in modern theology.

The immediate aim of the following reflections is therefore to recall the essence, nature and meaning of *sensus fidei* in the life of the Church. This is all because it increasingly mistakenly identifies its “sense of faith” with “public opinion” or “referendum.” It is therefore necessary to “confront” the nature of this precious gift with the notion of “public opinion,” which has recently claimed not only opinion-forming values, but also the right to regulate the doctrine of the Church.

Concept and Theological Foundations

Terminological attempts to describe the discussed reality abound in a number of the following terms: *sensus fidei*, *sensus fidelium*, *sensus christianus*, *sensus Ecclesiae* etc. Sometimes they are used as synonyms. However, some people see differences in meaning between these terms. The existence of many concepts to define this reality indicates the multitude of aspects, as well as the open nature of the topic.

E. Marin-Sola was the first to introduce the idea of the “sense of faith” into the scholastic concepts of dogma development. The book *L'évolution homogène du dogme catholique*, when discussing the development of dogmas, prefers to use the term *le sens de foi* (*sensus fidei*) instead of *le sens de fidèles* (*sensus fidelium*)⁴. C. Balić use the words *Il senso cristiano* (Christian sense) or *Il senso della fede* (sense of faith). Other terms are, according to him, less adequate or even ambiguous⁵. Y. Congar in *Per una teologia del laicato* stresses that the expressions *sensus* or *consensus fidelium*, *sensus Ecclesiae*, *sensus catholicus*, *sensus fidei*, *christiani populi fides*, *communis Ecclesiae fides* are not entirely unambiguous. They depend not only on historical conditions, but also on different

³ DV 8.

⁴ E. Marin-Sola, *L'évolution homogène du dogme catholique*, Fribourg 1924, vol. 1, 385: “pour écarter le péril d'en faire le monopole des simples fidèles au détriment des théologiens, des évêques et du pape.”

⁵ Stresses that “ad ogni modo deve essere ben sottolineato che noi diciamo costantemente «senso» cristiano o di fede: e non già sentimento «religioso: giacché il termine senso» ci riporta alla mente e – come abbiamo detto – presuppone un deposito intellettuale; mentre il termine sentimento di sapore modernistico désigna piuttosto la parte affettiva, la quale generalmente inclina al vago e al cieco.” C. Balić, *Il senso cristiano e il progresso del dogma*, in: *Lo sviluppo del dogma*, Roma 1953, 113.

points of view⁶. H. Vorgrimler notes that *sensus fidei* can mean a specific kind of specific cognition, derived from faith, as well as an individual consciousness enlightened by the faith of each believer. *Sensus fidelium* points to a community consciousness of faith, differing from *consensus fidelium*, which is the unanimity of believers born out of a sense of faith with regard to the specific content of the faith itself⁷.

the New Testament texts serve as a theological basis of *sensus fidei*. They emphasise that the work of the Holy Spirit is to understand the truths of faith. It is enough to mention: 1 Corinthians 2:16 – knowledge of the “plan of Christ;” Colossians 1:9 – “spiritual understanding;” Ephesians 1:18: “bright eyes of the heart.”⁸ This issue was not alien in the first centuries of the Church⁹. Tradition has often spoken of the “eyes of faith,” the “eyes of the heart,” the “eyes of the spirit.”¹⁰ Definition *sensus fidei* appears for the first time in Vincentus of Lerin¹¹. The first significant reflection on the epistemological value of the sense of faith in the context of Tradition and the Church was carried out by Melchior Canow *De Locis theologicis*¹². The nineteenth century, together with the deepening of the understanding of the mystery of the Church, brought further reflections on this issue. We should mention J.A. Mohler¹³ from the school in Tübingen as

⁶ Y. Congar in: *Per una teologia del laicato*, Brescia 1967, 402.

⁷ H. Vorgrimler, *Dal sensus fidei al consensus fidelium*, “Concilium” 21 (1985), 16; cf. O. Rush, *The Reception of Doctrine*, Rome 1997, 172f.213f.300f.

⁸ Cf. also J 14:17; 16:13; Phil 1:9.

⁹ For example, cf. K. Federer, *Liturgie und Glaube*, Freiburg/Schw 1950; O. Martil, *La tradición en san Augustin a través de la controversia pelagiana*, “Revista española de teología” 2 (1942), 54; J. Franzelin, *Tractatus de divina Traditione et Scriptura*, Rome 1875, 74-76.96f.; D. Koster, *Volk Gottes im Wachstum des Glaubens*, Heidelberg 1950, 68-70.

¹⁰ It is enough to mention the expression of St. Augustine: *Habet namque fieles oculos sitos* (PL 33, 458); St. Thomas of Aquinas emphasises: “Per lumen fidei vident esse credenda.” Sth III-II 1, 5, ad 1. In addition, terms are used: “ekklesiastikón phrónima,” “sensus ecclesiasticus et catholicus,” “sentire cum Ecclesia.”

¹¹ Vincenti Lirinensis, *Commonitorium Primum*, PL 50, 669.

¹² Cf. e.g. 3,4: *in ecclesia communis fidelium consensio*; 3,3: *Communi fidelium consensione*; 4,4: *Ecclesia in crecendo errare non potest*. M. Cano, *De Locis Theologicis, Liber IV*, in: *ibid., Opera I*, Rome 1890.

¹³ J. Mohler, *Die Einheit in der Kirche oder das Prinzip des Katholizismus*, J. Geiselman (ed.), Köln 1957; *idem, Symbolik oder darstellung der dogmatischen gegensätze der Katholiken und Protestanten*, J. Geiselman (ed.), Darmstadt 1958.

well as representatives of the Roman school: Perone¹⁴, Passaglia¹⁵, Francelin¹⁶, Scheeben¹⁷. In addition, J.H. Newman made a special contribution to the subject matter under consideration, stressing that *sensus fidei* is “a kind of instinct or *phronema* deeply anchored in the Mystical Body of Christ.”¹⁸

With the renewal of ecclesiology, the action of the Spirit of Truth is emphasized, both in the Magisterium and in the people of God. *Sensus fidei* belongs to all the People of God. It is significant that almost all the comments to the Constitution on God’s revelation *Dei Verbum* do not analyse the relationship between Christian experience¹⁹ and *sensus fidelium*²⁰. Nevertheless, the timeliness

¹⁴ Perone, *De immaculato Concepta B. V. Mariae concepta*, an dogmatico decreto definiri possit, disquisitio theologica, Rome 1847.

¹⁵ Passaglia, *De Ecclesia Christi commentariorum libri quinqué*, Ratisbonae 1853-1856.

¹⁶ *Tractatus de divina Traditione et Scriptura*, Rome 1875, ed. 2.

¹⁷ Francelin, *Theologische Erkenntnislehre*, Freiburg/Schw. 1953.

¹⁸ J.H. Newman, *On Consulting the Faithful in Matters of Doctrine*, New York 1961, 73; cf. J. Walgrave, *Il saggio di Newman su “la consultazione dei fedeli in materia dottrinale,” “Concilium”* 21(1985)4, 40-50.

¹⁹ ¹⁹ The understanding of the idea of “Christian experience” explains, for example, G. Molioli: “«Esperienza» si precisa [...] come un’esperienza di un pervenire del soggetto alla «realtà-verità» per l’adeguamento o il collocamento in essa; ed è esperienza del passaggio alla realtà-verità per la forza della provocazione (accolta) che viene dalla realtà non illusoria, ma apparente, non interlocutoria, ma «vera». Propriamente questo è il campo di quel «supere la realtà» che è «esperienza»: ed è un campo dove non la «differenza» ma la giustapposizione del «soggettivo» e dell’«oggettivo» mostra, al soggetto stesso, la sua problematica chiarezza; e dove il «supere» non può più essere né intellettualisticamente né «contemplativamente» ridotto. Vi si è verificata e vi si va verificando, infatti, una unificazione originale (e in qualche modo originaria?) tra «conoscenza» e «amore»; tra «contemplazione» e «azione»; tra «teoria» e «prassi.» Esperienza cristiana, in: *Nuovo dizionario di Spiritualità*, S. De Fiores, T. Goffi (ed.), Rome 1985, 536-537.

²⁰ ²⁰ The caution of the Church and theologians is understandable because, in the past, the concept of “experience,” which has been manipulated by modernism, has distorted the idea of revelation and the concept of faith. The reaction of the Church in this respect. Cf: *Lamentabili* (3.07.1907), ASS 40 (1907), 470f; *Pascendi dominici gregis* (8.09.1907), ASS 40 (1907), 596f; *Sacrorum Antistitum* (1.09.1910), ASS 2 (1910), 669f. On the concept of experience and *sensus fidei* see A. Bertuletti, *Il concetto di ‘Esperienza’*, in: *Levidenza e la feta*, G. Colombo (ed.), Milano 1988, 112-181; E. Schillebeeckx, *Il Cristo. La storia di una nuova prassi*, Brescia 1980; K. Rahner, *Grundkurs des Glaubens. Einführung in den Begriff des Christentums*, Freiburg 1976; H.U. von Balthasar, *Herrlichkeit. Schau der Gestalt*, Einsiedeln 1965; J.-B. Metz, *Zur Theologie der Welt*, Mainz-München 1968; G. O’Collins, *Fundamental Theology*, New York 1981 (chapter II). D. Vitali notes that “la difficoltà maggiore risiedeva nel concetto stesso di esperienza, che, dopo la tassativa esclusione dalla teologia manualistica, imposta dalla condanna del Magistero contro il modernismo, necessitava, e ancora necessita di una chiarificazione e di incorretto inserimento

of the Second Vatican Council became increasingly more apparent after the Second Vatican Council, together with *sensus fidei* in the context of other theological issues such as the hierarchy of truths²¹ and the concept of reception in the Church²².

Vaticanum II refers many times to the idea of the sense of faith and to concepts close to it: *sensus fidei*²³, *sensus catholicus*²⁴, *sensus christianus fidelium*²⁵,

nella teologia cattolica. Questa difficoltà è stata avvertita acutamente al Concilio; nelle discussioni in aula, alcuni Padri conciliari hanno opposto gravi obiezioni al termine, pacentando il rischio di cadere in teorie moderniste. Il dibattito è ancora percepibile nella formulazione del testo, che corregge il termine «*experientia*,» proposto originariamente nello schema, nella proposizione intima *spiritualium rerum quam experiuntur intelligentia*,» D. Vitali *Sensus Fidelium, Una funzione ecclesiale di intelligenza della fede*, Brescia 1993, 23.

²¹ UR 11. Theologian J. Alfaro emphasises, that «*Modus*,» ex quo insertio Indus textos provenit, tüten orem explicationem praebet: «*Quamvis procul dubio omnes veri testes revelatoe eadem fide divina tenendae sint, momentum et pondus earum differt pro nexu earum cum historia salutis et mysterio Christi*.» J. Alfaro, *Problema theologicum de munere theologiae respectu magisterii*, «*Gregorianum*» 57 (1976), 71; cf. also. U. Valeske, *Hierarchia Veritatum*, München 1968, 28f. See more on this subject: C. Dumont, *Y a-t-il une hierarchie de valeur entre les vérités de foi?*, «*Unam Sanctam*» 26 (1964), 157-161; G.H. Tavard, *Hierarchia veritatum: a preliminary investigation*, «*Theological Studies*» 32 (1971), 278-289; M. Cardona, *La "Jerarquía de las verdades" según el Concilio Vaticano II, y el orden de la real*, in: *Los movimientos teológicos secularizantes*, Madrid 1973, 143-163; E. Schlink, *Die "Hierarchie der Wahrheiten" und die Einigung der Kirchen*, «*Kerygma und Dogma*» 21 (1975), 1-12; D. Carroll, *Hierarchia Veritatum: a theological and pastoral insight of the Second Vatican Council*, «*Irish Theological Quarterly*» 44 (1977), 125-133; W. Hryniewicz, *La hiérarchie des vérités, Implications oecuméniques d'une idée chrétienne*, «*Irenikon*» 51 (1978), 470-491; G. Thils, *Hierarchia veritatum*, «*Revue Théologique de Louvain*» 10 (1979), 208-215.

²² For more on the subject, see Y. Congar, *La "Réception" comme réalité ecclésiologique*, «*Revue des Sciences Philosophiques et Théologiques*» 56 (1972), 369-403; M. Garijo, *Der Begriff "Rezeption" und sein Ort im Kern der katholischen Ekklesiologie*, in: *Theologischer Konsens und Kirchenspaltung*, P. Lengersfeld, H. Stobbe (ed.), Stuttgart 1981, 97-109; E. Kilmartin, *Reception in History: An Ecclesiological Phenomenon audits Significance*, «*Journal of Ecumenical Studies*» 21 (1984), 34-54; Th.P. Rausch, *Reception Past and Present*, «*Theological Studies*» 47 (1986), 497-508; W. Beinert, *Glaube als Zustimmung. Zur Interpretation kirchlicher Rezeptionsvorgänge*, Freiburg-Basel-Wien 1991; H. Fries, *Rezeption. Der Beitrag der Gläubigen für die Wahrheitsfindung in der Kirche*, «*Stimmen der Zeit*» 209 (1991), 3-16; A. Antón, *La "Recepción" en la Iglesia y Eclesiología*, «*Gregorianum*» 77 (1996), 57-96.437-469; O. Rush, *The Reception of Doctrine*, Rome 1997.

²³ LG 12, PO 9. In addition, in a way that *implicite* refers to the sense of faith in the Constitution *Dei Verbum*, no. 8 in the context of factors influencing the development of dogmas, speaking of a «*deep, experiential understanding of spiritual matters*.»

²⁴ AA 30.

²⁵ GS 52.35.

*sensus christianus*²⁶, *sensus religiosus*²⁷ *sensus Dei*²⁸, *sensus Christi et Ecclesiae*²⁹, *instinctus*³⁰. In the central place of the dogmatic Constitution on the Church, which explains the meaning of the Church as the “people of God,” there is a reference to the ordering of believers to Christ: “all the faithful, equipped with such great means of salvation, in all life situations and in every condition, are called by the Lord, everyone on his own path to perfect holiness, just as the Father himself is perfect.”³¹

Number 12 of the Constitution *Lumen Gentium* is the basic text in which the Council attaches particular importance to the sense of faith in the study of revealed truths. The number opens with an introductory paragraph emphasizing the participation of the People of God in the prophetic *munus* of Jesus Christ. This participation implies the witness of Christ through a life of faith and love. *The faithful as a whole, having been anointed by the Holy One (cf. 1 John 2:20 and 27), must not get lost in the faith, and this particular characteristic is revealed by the supernatural sense of the shelters of all the people when “from the bishops to the last of the lay faithful” [St. Augustine], it reveals its universal compatibility in matters of the shelter and customs. For thanks to this sense of the shelter, awakened and sustained by the Spirit of truth, the People of God under the guidance of the holy office of teacher – after whom, faithfully following, he no longer accepts the word, but truly accepts it (cf. 1 Tes 2:13) – he remains unshaken by faith once given to the saints (cf. Jd 3), penetrates it more deeply with the help of a just judgement and applies it more fully in life.*

The second part of number 12 of the Constitutions deals with the question of charisms. The Holy Spirit guides and sanctifies God’s people through the sacraments, ministries and charisms. The latter, as indicated by 1 Corinthians 12, 7 are intended for the community. Anointing with the Holy Spirit through which the people of God participate in prophetic *munus* of the Christ, leads to *indefectibilitas in credendo*. This *indefectibilitas* is expressed in *sensus fidelium*. *Sensus fidei* is expressed in *consensus universalis* of the People of God *de rebus fidei et morum*³². The basis of *sensus fidelium* is the Spirit of Truth,

²⁶ GS 62.

²⁷ NA 2; DH 4; GS 59.

²⁸ DY 15; GS 7.

²⁹ AG 19.

³⁰ SC 24; PC 12; GS 18.

³¹ LG 11.

³² God’s people have only that “activity” which is expressed in a universal consensus on matters of faith and customs. *Vaticanum II* is here a clear repetition of *Vaticanum I*. See U. Betti,

which internally enlightens the community of believers³³. The Council does not stop just at infallibility of *in appreciation*, fitting for the Magisterium, but also emphasises the infallibility of *in credendo*³⁴. The entire faithful receive from the Holy Spirit a supernatural sense of faith.

The Second Vatican Council developed the doctrine of St. Thomas of Aquinas, according to which the Church of Christ is founded on faith and the sacraments. The Council, referring extensively to Scripture, characterises the Church as the “new people of God,” the “messianic people” and the “community of life, love and truth,” of which the sacrament of baptism is a constitutive element. Lay people are one body in Christ and *with regard to the dignity and common to all the faithful in their work of building up the Body of Christ, true equality reigns among all*³⁵. Through baptism and confirmation, lay Catholics participate in the priestly, prophetic and royal functions of Christ. The charismatic aspect of *sensus fidei* deserves our attention because the response of the faithful to the staff of faith has its roots in the Holy Spirit³⁶. *Sensus fidei* is a charism that applies to all members of the Church. By his power the Church in her universality, which is manifested in the consensus of faith (*consensus fidei*), distinguishes and updates the object of faith in life, in constant harmony with the Magisterium of the Church³⁷.

La trasmissione della divina rivelazione, in: *La costituzione dogmatica sulla divina Rivelazione*, G. Favale (ed.), Torino 1967, 255-261; L. Pacomio (ed.), *Dei Verbum. Genesi della Costituzione sulla Divina Rivelazione*, Torino 1971, 73-89; R. Latourelie, *Teologia della rivelazione*, Assisi 1980, 472-478.

³³ This activity is negative: the behaviour of the Church from error or infallibility; and positive: the guarantee that the Church has the truth.

³⁴ See on this subject: Y. Congar, *Infailibilité et indéfectibilité*, “Revue de sciences philosophiques et théologiques” 54 (1970), 601-618; G. Philips, *La Chiesa e il suo mistero*, Milano 1975, vol. 1, 156f; H. Holstein, *Hiérarchie et peuple de Dieu d’après Lumen Gentium*, Paris 1970, 121f; K. Rahner, *Il magistero della Chiesa e l’odierna crisi dell’autorità*, in: *Nuovi saggi*, IV, Rome 1973, 415f.

³⁵ LG 32.

³⁶ On the theme of charisms, see: G. Rambaldi, *Carismi e laicato nella Chiesa. Teologia dei carismi comunione e corresponsabilità dei laici nella Chiesa*, “Gregorianum” 68 (1987), 57-101; *Uso e significato di ‘Carisma’ nel Vaticano L’Analisi e confronto di due passi conciliai sui carismi*, “Gregorianum” 56 (1975), 141-162.

³⁷ W. Beinert, *Bedeutung und Begründung des Glaubenssinnes (‘Sensus fidei’) als eines dogmatischen Erkenntniskriteriums*, “Catholica” 25 (1971), 293; cf. B. Lonergan, *The Assumption and Theology*, in: *Collection, Papers by Bernard Lonergan S.J.*, F. Crowe (ed.), New York 1967, 76; idem., *The Assumption and Theology*, in: *Vers le dogme de l’Assomption*, Montréal 1948, 411-424.

Nature Of *Sensus Fidei*

Theologians describe *sensus fidei* as a supernormal ability to understand the truth contained in Revelation, even if it is not expressed in the following ways *explicitly*. The object of revelation is present in the faith of God's people. *Sensus fidei* appears as one of the factors in the development of dogmas, which not only allows us to abide in the truth, but also leads to the truth³⁸. The sense of faith is seen as a form of instinct, as a certain intuitive perception, which is situated deep in the reality of the Mystical Body of Christ. *Sensus fidei*, guided by the Holy Spirit, on the one hand leads to the rejection of an error, and on the other hand it is able to "synthesise" individual aspects of a particular truth of faith.

Sensus fidei is a peculiar form of personal cognition that precedes reflective cognition. It is the fruit of faith, the staff and the Holy Spirit who acts in believers through gifts and charisms. In this way believers can get to know and understand the truths of faith better³⁹. By the power of faith, man receives the ability, the "awareness," the sensitivity to God's things. It is about a kind of "light" and orientation towards everything that belongs to an object, a space of faith⁴⁰. Faith can become a source of reflection on which the development of theological cognition depends. Moreover, in this way you can rediscover truths that have been forgotten. A believer who lives intensely on faith does not so much notice a certain "dry" number of intellectual statements or formulas, but rather meets the living News, the Reality in which he believes. St. Thomas expresses this perfectly in the statement: *Actus autem credentis non terminatur ad enuntiabile, sed ad rem*⁴¹.

³⁸ G. Biondo, *Il sensus fidelium nel Vaticano II e nei Sinodi dei Vescovi*, Rome 1989, 31.

³⁹ J. Alfaro, *Cognitio Dei et Christi in I Jo*, "Verbum Domini" 39 (1961), 90; B. Lonergan, *The Assumption and Theology*, 76. Z. Alszeghy rightly observes: "L'impulso della grazia produce una inclinazione insieme intellettuale e affettiva, in modo tale che è inutile domandare se un determinato fattore riguarda l'intelletto o la volontà, poiché tutto si svolge ad un livello così profondo dell'esistenza umana, in cui non ha senso applicare la distinzione delle varie componenti della psiche umana. Z. Alszeghy, Il senso della fede e lo sviluppo dogmatico," in: *Vaticano II: Bilancio e prospettive venticinque anni dopo (1962-1987)*, R. Latourelle (ed.), Assisi 1987, 149.

⁴⁰ L. Scheffczyk emphasises: "Questa fede è il permanere stabilmente nella verità di Gesù Cristo, il sentirsi legati alla Sua parola e alla Sua persona, l'adottare e l'essere adottati da ciò che è la via, la verità e la vita" (Gv 14, 16). È comprensibile che solo una tale vera, viva e profonda fede [...] può progredire sino a quella maturità, a quell'intuito spirituale e a quella capacità di giudizio che sono chiusi nel «sensus fidelium»." L. Scheffczyk, *Sensus fidelium: testimonianza della comunità*, "Communio" 97 (1988), 124.

⁴¹ Thomas Aquinas, S. Th II-II, q. 1, a. 2, ad 2.

A Christian, through an authentic life of faith, is able to make judgements according to *connaturalitas* (conformity, appropriateness) in matters of revelation. The more he is “immersed” in God, the deeper he can understand and understand his mysteries⁴². In other words, *habitus* the supernatural faith, being a certain “conformity” with the revealed object, enables the believer to know the revealed truth, different from that which is obtained through speculative theological reasoning. It is therefore necessary to speak of an inner coherence between the sense of faith and the life of grace.

Sensus fidei, as the ability to come into contact with the revealed things, is by its nature directed towards the object of revelation and convinces the faithful as to its credibility. However, it should be remembered that it does not protect absolutely from creating false visions about what constitutes the deposit of faith. Moreover, it does not lead to the formation of a “new revelation.” Furthermore, it does not replace rational motives⁴³. Instead, it is the concrete “ability” of a believer who lives in closeness to Christ. Through a sense of faith, the believer is able to spontaneously and globally perceive the truths of revelation. He participates, so to speak, in the “thoughts” of Christ (*nous* 1 Corinthians 2, 16), in the “consciousness” of Jesus (*ennoia*, 1 Pt 4, 1). *Sensus fidei* is the ability to perceive in general and in detail the meaning and value of all that is the object of faith.

The sense of faith is not a cognitive process of a discursive, formal or abstract nature. However, it is an internal, experiential and affective cognition. *Sensus fidei* makes the believer distinguish whether the values derived from tradition are “consonant” with the deposit of faith. The Christian “experiences” the mystery in which he participates. In the light of grace he recognises the Word of God. *Sensus fidei* is, as emphasised the Instruction *Domini Veritatis*, *a property of the theological faith which, as a gift from God, allows personal adherence to the Truth and therefore cannot be mistaken. This individual faith is also the faith of the Church, because God has entrusted the Church to guard the Word, so what we believe in is what the Church believes in. Sensus fidei entails, by its very nature, a profound conformity of spirit and heart with the Church, ‘sentire cum Ecclesia.’*⁴⁴

⁴² Thomas Aquinas, S. Th II-II, q. 45, a. 2; q. 1, a. 4 ad 3. It is worth mentioning that the encyclical *Humani generis* also indicates this *connaturalitas*: AAS 42 (1950), 574.

⁴³ Z. Alszeghy, M. Flick, *Lo sviluppo del dogma*, 111: “Chi ha questo senso, scopre più facilmente i principi che devono essere applicati in un caso determinato, e con maggiore spontaneità riconosce le virtualità del dato rivelato. Il senso della fede permette così di afferrare il ragionamento in una forma accorciata, globale ed implicita, senza che i singoli passi della deduzione e della riduzione diventino distintamente consapevoli.”

⁴⁴ *Donum Veritatis*, in: AAS 82 (1990), 1565.

Sensus fidei, in the full sense of the word, requires the gifts of the Holy Spirit, especially the gift of wisdom and knowledge. In the area of salvific truth, the Holy Spirit enlivens the Mystical Body of Christ through the gifts given to individual believers in the sacrament of Confirmation. It is the Holy Spirit that directs the believer to the direct object of faith and to everything that has been revealed in relation to him. Therefore, the Holy Spirit, in giving its gifts, is the foundation of the *sensus fidei*. The sense of faith is a living ability that can only be formed and sustained in its living realization. This fulfilment also includes the impulse of heart, devotion and faith lived out in prayer. The sense of faith is not a mere intellectual ability, but the fruit of a fully human attitude of faith, a word that lives in the hearts of the faithful⁴⁵.

⁴⁵ For further details, see O.H. Pesch, *Istinkt und Glaubenswille*, "Catholica" 16 (1962), 69-77; H. Hamman, *Die neueren katholischen Erklärungen Dogmenentwicklung*, Essen 1965, 242-262; J. Beumer, *Glaubenssinn der Kirche als Quelle einer Definition*, "Theologie und Glaube" 45 (1955), 250-260; J.W. Glaser, *Authority, Connatural Knowledge, and the Spontaneous Judgment of the Faithful*, "Theological Studies" 29 (1968), 742-751; J. Sancho Bielsa, *Infalibilidad del pueblo de Dios. "Sensus fidei" e infalibilidad organica de la Iglesia en la Constitution "Lumen Gentium" del Concilio Vaticano II*, Pamplona 1971; W. Beinert, *Bedeutung und Begründung des Glaubenssinnes ("Sensus fidei") als eines dogmatischen Erkenntniskriteriums*, "Catholica" 25 (1971), 271-303; *ibid.*, *Das Finden und Verkunden der Wahrheit in der Gemeinschaft der Kirche*, "Catholica" 43 (1989), 1-30; W.M. Thompson, *Sensus Fidelium and Infallibility*, "American Ecclesiastical Review" 167 (1973), 450-486; F. Dumont, *Remarques critiques pour une theologie de 'consensus fidelium'*, in: *Foi populaire, foi savante*, Paris 1976, 49-60; J.M.R. Tillard, *Le 'Sensus Fidelium'. Reflexion Theologique*, in: *Foi populaire, foi savante*, Paris 1976, 9-40; L. Fernandez De Traconiz, *Sensus fidei: logica connatural de la existencia cristiana. Un estudio del recurso al sensus fidei en la teologia catolica de 1950 a 1970*, Vitoria 1976; *ibidem*, *La teologia sobre el 'sensus fidei' de 1960 a 1970*, "Scriptorium Victoriense" 29 (1982), 133-179; 31 (1984), 555; 6 (1988), 33-58; *ibidem*, *Recurso al 'sensus fidei' en la teologia catolica de 1950-a 1960*, "Scriptorium Victoriense" 27 (1980), 142-183; 28 (1981), 39-75; H. Wagner, *Glaubenssinn, Glaubenszustimmung und Glaubenskonsens*, "Theologie und Glaube" 69 (1979), 263-271; E. Schillebeeckx, B. van Iersel (ed.), *Rivelazione e esperienza*, "Concilium" 3 (1978), 13-191; K. Rahner, *Offizielle Glaubenslehre der Kirche und faktische Glaubigkeit des Volkes*, in: *Theologie in Freiheit und Verantwortung*, K. Rahner, H. Fries (ed.), München 1984, 15-29; J. Kerkhofs, *Le peuple de Dieu et il infallible? L'importance du 'sensus fidelium' dans l'Eglise postconciliaire*, "Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie" 35 (1988), 3-19; J. Dobbin, *Sensus Fidelium Reconsidered*, "New Theology Review" 2 (1989), 48-64; P. Scharr, *Consensus fidelium. Zur Unfehlbarkeit der Kirche aus der Perspektive einer Konsensustheorie der Wahrheit*, Würzburg 1992; D. Vitali, *Sensus Fidelium. Una funzione ecclesiale di intelligenza della fede*, Brescia 1993.

The Substance of *Consensus Fidelium*

It is true that the sense of faith is one of the factors in the development of dogmas because it allows us to recognize the Word of God in those statements that come from revelation in the plane of homogeneous evolution. However, the difficulty remains as to how to determine *sensus fidelium* of Christians, or simply Catholics, who all over the world are characterised by significant cultural differences and divisions?

As in the past, the problem is also growing in modern times, when not all of the Church assesses questions of faith in the same way. A belief in the correctness of a new formulation of a particular truth of faith can be achieved on the basis of *sensus fidei* of the whole Church. The sense of faith through belonging to the inner life of faith of every believer, however, is not directly accessible. It can only be reached by *consensus fidelium*. In the context of the terms *Universitas fidelium* and *sensus fidei*, as applied by the Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, the difficulty of defining this consensus of the whole Church on the level of faith and customs arises (*de fide et moribus*).

In connection with the above reflections, F.A. Sullivan indicates a theological difficulty. After *Vaticanum II*, it is emphasised that many elements of sanctification and truth, as gifts of the Church of Christ, are also found outside the Catholic Church. Is it still possible to think about the infallibility of Catholics *in credendo*, if a certain truth of faith is not approved by other Christians? Perhaps, then, a broad consensus among the other most important churches and Christian communities should be taken into account. Perhaps only such a consensus would satisfy the conditions of infallibility *in credendo*?⁴⁶

Another difficulty, of a practical nature, is recalled by G. Sala, who emphasises that the “quality” of God’s people, who are entitled to infallibility *in credendo*, leaves a lot to wish for. The dissonance between official Catholics from statistics and those practising and living in faith is getting greater and greater. Moreover, the phenomenon of “partial identification” of individual members of the community with the Church is spreading. These circumstances pose

⁴⁶ F.A. Sullivan, *Il Magistero nella Chiesa cattolica*, Brescia 1986, 28. The author tries to answer: “credo sarebbe ancora in armonia con la dottrina del Vaticano II attribuire infallibilita nella fede alla chiesa cattolica romana anche quando il suo credo non venisse condiviso da altri cristiani. L’affermazione: la Chiesa di Cristo «sussiste» nella chiesa Cattolica significa che tutte le proprietà essenziali della Chiesa di Cristo sussistono anche nella chiesa Cattolica.” *Ibid.*, 29.

a danger not only to the anti-Catholic, but also to the anti-Christian infiltration under the apparent name of God's people⁴⁷.

It should be remembered that the truths of faith considered by the faithful refer rather to a concrete existential situation. It is difficult to talk about speculative deliberations. Moreover, the faithful are generally lacking in this "vigilance, intellectual sensitivity," which would make it possible to clearly resolve the question of continuity between certain statements of faith and those arising from the Revelation. The internal judgement is not realised immediately, but rather slowly, tightens and deepens over time. Therefore, one must be restrained in stating that we are dealing with reality *sensus fidei*. History teaches us that while there have been cases in which God's people, through their faith, rejected, for example, the heresy of Arianism while it was accepted by many Church representatives, there are examples of departure from the true doctrine of the Church of large masses of people on the other hand.

Nevertheless, there are criteria for determining the authenticity of the doctrine proclaimed on the basis of the sense of faith of the whole Church. Here we should indicate the text from Letter to Romans 12, 6: *And according to the grace given to us, we have various gifts: be the gift of prophecy – to be used in accordance with faith*, and the Gospel according to St. Matthew 7, 16: *You will know them by their fruits*. The first passage indicates that the spontaneous acceptance or rejection of a particular doctrine should be judged on the basis of the Revelation. Then we can be sure that the decision comes from the Spirit of truth is authentic, is by God's will. In the second case, the proclamation of the truth with one's life, which confirms the fulfilment of God's will, should mobilize one to observe God's law. It should become a motive for 'producing good fruit'.

Sensus fidei leads to unquestionable certainty only if the whole Church from bishops to the last of the lay faithful is convinced of the truthfulness of a particular doctrine. The more common this compliance is, the closer we get to absolute certainty. However, it must always be remembered that the spontaneous approval of a certain doctrine does not yet determine its truthfulness. Not always *vox populi* is *vox Dei*. Consensus becomes a criterion of truth when the community of believers continues (a permanent state, can be extended significantly over time) in a positive conviction of a particular doctrine. Moreover, they are aware of all the aspects of it, considers all the arguments against it, considers all the consequences.

⁴⁷ G. Sala, *Magistero*, in: *Dizionario Teologico Interdisciplinare*, Torino 1977, vol. 2, 426.

Sensus Fidei and Public Opinion

Recourse to *sensus fidei* is becoming increasingly more frequent today. Another element is answering the question whether the “expansion” of referring to this reality goes hand in hand with a proper understanding of it? Many questions arise here: Do you think *sensus fidei* – *fidelium* is public opinion? Is it possible to treat a referendum (so popular today in “usurping” decisions on fundamental issues, often beyond human competence) as an expression of *sensus fidelium*? Is it possible that this supernatural ability to study the mysteries of revelation by God’s people is in contradiction, or at least in competition, to the decisions of the Magisterium of the Church?

We have already mentioned that the ultimate addressee of Revelation is the Church as God’s people, embracing the hierarchical community and the laity. It includes infallibility *in credendo* based on the deep unity of the Church, which turns out to be *a people united by the unity of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit*⁴⁸. The College, including the Bishop of Rome, successor of Peter, with the power of apostolic succession, has authoritative power, infallibility *in docendo*. It is up to it to define and interpret authentic doctrine.

We are dealing here with a question that is quite topical today, referring to the so-called “authority of the faithful” in the articulation and development of the doctrine of faith⁴⁹. Indeed, among post-conciliar issues, which are also being addressed today with increased force, is the above mentioned issue. Is it possible to say that the classical term “Magisterium” contains the reality that is connected with the “doctrinal authority” of the faithful? Maybe in order to overcome the “assisting and caring Church” scheme, this term, as its supporters argue, will express the will to make the faithful not only passive addressees who accept the teachings of the Magisterium of the Church, but also those who have an active role in clarifying and developing the truths of faith? Can there be a risk of detachment, a kind of “doctrinal competition” between the Magisterium and the faithful?

⁴⁸ LG 4.

⁴⁹ The “doctrinal authority” of the faithful is the term that seems to come from areas of German theological thought (*Lehrautorität*) and differs from the “magisterium” (*Lehramt*). J.B. Metz and E. Schillebeeckx emphasise that “Volendo superare lo schema di «Chiesa assistenziale» (la gerarchia insegna, i teologi spiegano, I fedeli ascoltano e obbediscono), esso include ed esprime la volontà teologica di fare dei fedeli non più i «destinatari passivo-recettivi del magistero ecclesiale», ma i «soggetti vivi nella compagine ecclesiale» con ruolo attivo «nell’articolazione e nello sviluppo della fede.» Editoriale, “Concilium” 21 (1985), 11.

Today we are witnessing many “temptations” on the part of the laity towards the interpretation of the above issues. Certain groups of people, in the name of their own popularity, aspire to decide about changes in many matters concerning the life of the Church. What is more, these groups stress that the conviction of the public or the results of the referendum are sufficient motivations for change also on a doctrinal-disciplinary level. It is becoming popular to think that the expression of the will of a particular group of people is *hic et nunc* idea of their faith. The above reflections raise the question of how this problem should be understood.

The Second Vatican Council and most theologians accept the fact that something can be “discovered or deepened” by the faithful⁵⁰ and recognises the obligation to consult the faithful about certain truths. Nevertheless, it excludes any compromise between the normative function of the Magisterium and the function of the witness of the people of God. It should be strongly emphasised that it is a mistake to refer to the sociological argument that the opinion of a large number of Christians should be a direct and adequate expression of the supernatural “sense of faith.” In fact, the opinions of the faithful cannot be simply, uncritically, identified with “*sensus fidei*.” The ideas that circulate in God’s people are not always and not all of them are coherent with faith. All the more so because they can be easily created and suggested by public opinion, manipulated so much by the contemporary media. The enthusiastic adhesion of a certain group to an idea does not always mean it is true. *Sensus fidei* does not coincide, does not identify with public opinion.

It is therefore necessary to stress that a voice of public opinion, a kind of referendum, cannot pretend to call itself *sensus fidelium*. All the more because it cannot be considered competitive with the Magisterium of the Church. Rightly notes in his excellent article the already mentioned L Scheffczyk: *Those bound only by ‘private’ faith; those who profess “christianismus vagas,” or are ready to identify themselves only partially with the Church, they cannot carry out “sensus fidelium” [...]. The sense of the faith cannot be equated with the dominant tendency in theology and Christian thought. The sense of the faith does not result from the decision of the majority either*⁵¹.

In the Church there is no room for “arrogance of self-dogmatisation.” All those who call for the “democratisation of the Church” must respect the

⁵⁰ LG 12. For an active testimony of the faithful see: A. Acerbi, *Due ecclesiologie. Ecclesiologia giuridica ed ecclesiologia di comunione nella “Lumen gentium,”* Bologna 1975, 510f; G. Thils, *L’infaillibilité du Peuple chrétien “in credendo.” Notes de théologie post-tridentine,* Louvain 1963.

⁵¹ L. Scheffczyk, *Sensus fidelium*, 124.

community dimension of faith⁵². It is a mistake to identify *sensus Ecclesiae* z *consensus Ecclesiae*. Moreover, it is necessary to “anchor” in the Tradition of the Church, to realise the principle of Vincentus of Lerin *Quod ubique, quod semper; quod ab omnibus, creditum est*⁵³. Only in this way can God’s people, faithfully following the Magisterium of the Church and remaining unwavering “with faith once given to the saints,” effectively and genuinely move towards God⁵⁴.

From the foregoing considerations it results that *sensus fidei* must be situated in the context of the community of the Church. The Spirit of Truth, which is present in all the baptized, is realized in the prophetic function of Christ and the Church as *via empirica* of the living Tradition of the Church⁵⁵.

The sense of faith, as a particular ability to understand and define revealed truth, should be seen as a help in recognising authentic doctrine, and not as an act that will ratify the teachings of the Church’s Teachers’ Office on a juridical level. The Magisterium’s power of office is only a guide to the sense of faith in the Church. It is his competence to defend the authenticity of the revealed doctrine, and in particular those truths that are related to the devotion of the faithful. However, before the Magisterium makes a decision, it is necessary to follow the living Tradition of the Church. The most important decisions of the Magisterium are not arbitrary, they are motivated and based on the faith of the Church.

⁵² J. Ratzinger, *Democratizzazione della Chiesa?*, in: *Democrazia nella Chiesa. Possibilita, limiti, pericoli*, J. Ratzinger, H. Maier (ed.), Rome 1971, 55: “[...] è strano che oggi non di rado quei circoli che propugnano con tanto calore la democratizzazione della Chiesa dimostrino così poco rispetto per la fede comune delle comunità e vedano in questa voce della maggioranza dei credenti solamente la libertà apparente, immanente al sistema, che attraverso il loro sforzo critico deve essere dimostrata come non-libertà. L’arroganza dell’autodogmatizzazione che qui traspare non può essere uno strumento di salvezza per il futuro della Chiesa.”

⁵³ Vincenti Lirinensis, *Commonitorium* c. 2, in: PL 50, 640.

⁵⁴ LG 12. See on this subject: J.B. Metz, E. Schillebeeckx (ed.), *L’autorità dottrinale dei fedeli*, “Concilium” 21 (1985), 11-124; M. Seybold, *Kirchliches Lehramt und allgemeiner Glaubenssinn*, “Theologie und Glaube” 65 (1975), 266-277; A. Dulles, *The Two Magisteria: An Interim Reflection*, “Catholic Theological Society of America Proceedings” 35 (1980), 155-169; H. Fries, *Sensus fidelium. Der Theologe zwischen dem Lehramt der Hierarchie und dem Lehramt der Gläubigen*, in: *Theologe und Hierarchie*, J. Pfammater, E. Christen (ed.), Zurich 1988, 55-77; D. Wiederkehr, *Der Glaubenssinn des Gottesvolkes – Konkurrent oder Partner des Lehramtes?*, Freiburg-Basel-Wien 1994.

⁵⁵ S. Pie-Ninot, *Sensus fidei*, in: *Dizionario di Teologia Fondamentale*, R. Latourelle, R. Fisichella (ed.), Assisi 1990, 1133-1134. Cf. Z. Alszeghy, M. Flick, *Lo sviluppo del dogma*, op. cit., 112: “Il magistero esteriore della chiesa non basta per dare la fede, e molto meno per dare l’intelligenza della fede, senza il magistero interiore dello Spirito; ma, dall’altra parte, proprio la comunione con il magistero gerarchico e il clima propizio per ricevere dallo Spirito il senso della fede, che a sua volta non è altro che la capacità di ottenere un’intelligenza più completa della stessa dottrina predicata dal magistero gerarchico.”

Just like *sensus fidei* of the whole Church requires a decision of the Magisterium in order to achieve a full and authoritative definition, so the Magisterium is placed in the context of the faith of the whole Church and updates itself in the community of the Church. Only the Magisterium has the dignity of authority deciding on the “fruits” of the sense of faith. Authoritative intervention of the Magisterium is necessary to determine whether or not the doctrine considered in the Church belongs to the deposit of the revealed. Neither the laity itself nor its individual members have any active doctrinal authority in the area of *de fide et moribus*. It cannot reach out to the results that the development of dogmas is aiming at on his own.

The awareness of the faith of the whole Church in the face of a certain revealed truth can be said to precede the act of the Magisterium. Of course, this does not mean that everyone faithful, before the definition, should believe *explicite* in this truth, as revealed by God. The Magisterium defines the awareness of the faith of the universal Church and at the same time communicates it to those who have not yet come to this conviction⁵⁶. It is possible, in certain respects, to speak of priority *sensus fidei* of believers, to the Magisterium and theology. This is, however, a priority understood as conformity in faith on the part of all believers, which also includes shepherds and theologians. Neither juridical sense nor absolute values can be attributed to this priority.

When considering the issue of *sensus fidei* as far as the development of dogmas is concerned, it can be said that if the people of God have primacy in the order of purpose, the Magisterium has priority in the order of authentic interpretation of God’s truths. For the faith of God’s people achieves its precise, confident and binding expression only when it is defined by the Magisterium.

The distinction between “infallibility *in credendo*,” in other words passive, and “infallibility *in docendo*,” active, does not mean separation or division between hierarchy and lay Catholics. It is about a common exchange relationship, a relationship in which a higher order is realised in mutual cooperation⁵⁷. Between these types of infallibility there is mutual permeation⁵⁸.

⁵⁶ Cf. W. Knoch, *Bóg szuka człowieka. Objawienie, Pismo Święte, Tradycja*, translated by: B. Szlagor, M. Szlagor, Poznań 2000, 112f; A. Anton, *Il compito ‘ecclesiale’ e ‘scientifico’ del teologo nell’Istruzione ‘Donum Veritatis’*, “La Civiltà cattolica” 148 (1997), vol. 3, 375; A.G. Aiello, *Sviluppo del dogma e tradizione*, 352.

⁵⁷ Cf. L. Scheffczyk, *Sensus fidelium*, art. cit., 122.

⁵⁸ When *Lumen Gentium* speaks of the infallibility of the Church, referring also to the infallibility of the faithful, who are part of the people of God, it does not contradict the hierarchical vision of the Church, clearly shown in chapter III. We can talk about the infallibility

In Conclusion

In order to understand the meaning of the sense of faith, it is necessary to distinguish between *sensus fidei* (a person's ability to believe), *sensus fidelium* (competent to the Church as *congregatio fidelium*, and is based on *sensus fidei*) and *consensus fidei – fidelium* (points to the unity of the Church, which is expressed in a common confession of faith, *credo*).

Sensus fidei is expressed as intuition or understanding of faith. This means the potential ability of a person to hear God's Word addressed to them and to accept it as God's Word. This makes it possible for members of the Church to "grasp" the revelations. This charism or ability to discern was given to the whole Church by the Holy Spirit. It is one of the ways in which the faithful bear witness to their faith and discover the tradition of the Church. The history of the development of dogma shows that God's people also contribute to a deeper understanding of the truths of faith. *Consensus fidei* has always had value in Catholic theology. The testimony of God's people helps to recognise the revealed truth.

The Holy Spirit gives believers the ability to understand the supernatural truth revealed by Christ. In this way supernatural reality is becoming increasingly better known and expressed more precisely through new language formulations. *Sensus fidei* is born from the Christian experience of participating in the life of grace, and leads to a clearer understanding of the mystery than logical discourse is able to do. The theology of *sensus fidei*, stressing the active role not only of *Ecclesia docente*, but also *discente*, has enlivened reflections on the Church as a "living organism" whose global growth, especially in faith, is realised in the vital function of the whole organism.

In order to make a reliable judgement on issues that affect the sense of faith, it is necessary to appeal and to base it on the teaching of the Magisterium of the Church. Only then the understanding of revelation through *sensus fidei* can be expressed through linguistic expression in a way that is certain and appropriate to the reality being expressed.

Between *sensus fidei* and the teachings of the Magisterium of the Church there are mutual relationships. *Sensus fidei* needs the Magisterium, similarly the teachings of Magisterium should also take into consideration the fruits of *sensus*

of the faithful *in credendo*, but not about the magisterium of the faithful. In addition, the basic distinction between the infallibility of the faithful and the infallibility of the Shepherds of the Church is expressed in this, that the former are infallible *in faith* and the latter *in teaching*. Mutual interdependence is realised here.

fidelium. We can therefore speak of the interpenetration of these two realities. “Mutual reciprocity” – the coordination between laity and Shepherds of the Church must lead to many benefits, including the proclamation of revealed truth.

Sensus fidei seems to point to people who are above all “poor in spirit.” It is true that God often gives to simple people, but deeply believing, the ability of the “eyes of faith” of supernatural reality. After all, Jesus Christ Himself says: *I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have covered these things from the wise and prudent, and revealed them to the simple ones. Yes, Father, because that was your liking* (Luke 10:21). Indeed, a true believer has this wisdom, even without profound theological knowledge. The more intensely a person lives a spiritual experience, the more fruitful he or she will participate in the sense of faith. At times, however, too much detachment of *sensus fidei* from the need for systematic intellectual formation is sought. It is necessary to be aware that a person open to the grace, instructed by the teaching of the Magisterium, the teaching of theology, is thus in a more advantageous situation in relation to the charism of *sensus fidei*. For man “juxtaposes,” analyses facts and words, and understands them according to his own experience and his cognitive abilities, according to the principle: *ad modum recipientis recipitur*. The Holy Spirit helps to evaluate what is understood. However, it does not miraculously replace a proper understanding of facts and words, which are, after all, the subject of this judgement⁵⁹.

Post-conciliar theology places *sensus fidei* above all in the context of the infallibility of the whole Church. In addition, it sees it as a charism handed down from the Holy Spirit to the Church. Considering *sensus fidei*, as “intuition,” “instinct” or “autonomous judgement” we do not mean irrational aspect. However, theologians emphasise that it is not possible to overestimate *sensus fidei*, too much, because it has its limitations. It is difficult to define a consensus of faith. The faith of much of God’s people is, unfortunately, weak, limited, prone to one-sidedness, and certainly cannot be the foundation for precise deliberations, although it does inspire them in a way.

⁵⁹ So a specific postulate and task emerges. Continuous efforts should be made to promote the religious culture of the laity, the promotion of theological knowledge. In this way, man, recalling the words of John Paul II from the Encyclical *Fides et Ratio*, by faith and reason, using the gift of *sensus fidei*, rises towards contemplation of the One Truth, God Himself.