

SENSUS FIDEI: FAITH "MAKING SENSE" OF REVELATION

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*[The author proposes a hermeneutical approach to the nature and function of an individual believer's sense of the faith. It is proposed that *sensus fidei* be seen as both an imaginative capacity endowed by the Spirit, and an individual's understanding of the community's faith. Imagination is its primary mode; everyday life is its context; the narrative of a life is its shape; and Jesus Christ is its primary norm. Eight functions of the capacity of *sensus fidei* are then outlined.]*

SINCE THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL much has been written on that elusive ecclesial reality *sensus fidelium*.¹ The theological literature has focused mainly on its function as a criterion in the reception by the faithful of church teaching. Two texts from Vatican II have been seminal in the discussion. *Lumen gentium* no. 12 states that, because of its anointing by the Holy Spirit, the whole body of the faithful possesses a sure sense of the faith.² *Dei Verbum* no. 8 states that the Holy Spirit enables the apostolic tradition to progress by means of such a lived sense of the faith, in con-

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¹ For an extended bibliography, see Daniel J. Finucane, *Sensus Fidelium: The Use of a Concept in the Post-Vatican II Era* (San Francisco: International Scholars, 1996) 655–89.

² "The holy people of God shares also in Christ's prophetic office: it spreads abroad a living witness to him, especially by a life of faith and love and by offering to God a sacrifice of praise, the fruit of lips confessing his name (see Heb 13:15). The whole body of the faithful who have received an anointing which comes from the holy one (see 1 Jn 2:20 and 27) cannot be mistaken in belief. It shows this characteristic through the entire people's supernatural sense of the faith [*sensus fidei*], when, "from the bishops to the last of the faithful" (Augustine), it manifests a universal consensus in matters of faith and morals. By this sense of the faith, aroused and sustained by the Spirit of truth, the people of God, guided by the sacred magisterium which it faithfully obeys, receives not the word of human beings, but truly the word of God (see 1 Th 2:13), "the faith once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3). The people unfailingly adheres to this faith, penetrates it more deeply through right judgment, and applies it more fully in daily life."

junction with two other factors, the work of theologians and the authoritative teaching of the magisterium.³

This ecclesiological function of the *sensus fidelium* as a criterion of theological knowledge will not be addressed here. A full examination of theological epistemology would need to demonstrate the necessary critical relationship of *sensus fidelium* not only with Scripture and tradition but also with the magisterium and contemporary theology.⁴ Elsewhere I have proposed that the integration of these five criteria could be developed in terms of a theology of reception.⁵

My focus in this article is much narrower. I wish to explore not so much the *sensus fidei fidelium* (the *sensus fidei* of the whole body of the faithful), but rather the *sensus fidei fidelis* (the *sensus fidei* belonging to the individual believer within the community of the faithful). There is a certain terminological confusion in the literature regarding this issue. Some writers use the terms *sensus fidelium* and *sensus fidei* synonymously when referring to the communal sense of the faith (as in *Lumen gentium* no. 12). Others restrict *sensus fidei* to the sense that an individual believer has of the faith, and for the communal sense they employ the phrase *sensus fidelium*. For the sake of highlighting the interplay between individual and communal faith, I follow the latter usage.⁶

Nowhere have I found a developed theology of how this *sensus* functions

³ “The tradition that comes from the apostles makes progress in the church, with the help of the Holy Spirit. There is a growth in insight into the realities and words that are passed on. This comes about through the contemplation and study of believers who ponder these things in their hearts (see Lk 2:19, 51) [theology]. It comes from the intimate sense of spiritual realities which they experience [*sensus fidei*] (*tum ex intima spiritualium rerum quam experiuntur intelligentia*). And it comes from the preaching of those who, on succeeding to the office of bishop, have received the sure charism of truth [magisterium]. Thus, as the centuries go by, the church is always advancing towards the plenitude of divine truth, until eventually the words of God are fulfilled in it.”

⁴ The classic conciliar text on the interrelationship of these five is *Dei Verbum*. For a systematic treatment of this interrelationship, see Wolfgang Beinert, “Theologische Erkenntnislehre,” in *Glaubenszugänge: Lehrbuch der Katholischen Dogmatik*, ed. Wolfgang Beinert (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1995) 1.47–197.

⁵ See Ormond Rush, “Determining Catholic Orthodoxy: Monologue or Dialogue?” *Pacifica* 12 (1999) 123–42. I examine presuppositions for such a theology in Ormond Rush, *The Reception of Doctrine: An Appropriation of Hans Robert Jauss’ Reception Aesthetics and Literary Hermeneutics* (Rome: Gregorian University, 1997). See also Wolfgang Beinert, “The Subjects of Reception,” in *Reception and Communion Among Churches*, ed. H. Legrand, J. Manzanares and A. Garcia (Washington: Catholic University of America, 1997) 324–46.

⁶ Throughout the literature, the Latin word *sensus* is translated variously as an “instinct,” a “sixth sense,” “spiritual sense,” an “appreciation,” or a “flair” for the faith. For the wide range of meanings of the Latin word *sensus*, see *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, ed. P. G. W. Glare (Oxford: Clarendon, 1980) 7.1735–36, which gives

in the individual. Although the disciplines of spirituality and moral theology deal with the reality, it is often without explicit reference to the term. Even extended systematic works on the theology of faith lack precision as to the nature and function of an individual's *sensus fidei*.⁷ This article is a very tentative and far from complete attempt to sketch out the beginnings of a systematic theology of *sensus fidei fidelis*.

CIRCLES OF UNDERSTANDING

As a background theory for examining this phenomenon of human understanding of God's revelation I will be drawing upon the philosophical hermeneutical tradition, with its emphasis on the entwining of the hermeneutical triad: understanding, interpretation, and application.⁸ *Understanding* within experience, it is claimed, is already an *interpretation* out of a familiar framework from the past that enables an *application* of meaning to one's present context. This insight is further captured in the notion of "the hermeneutical circle." A dialectic exists between our understanding of "the whole" of a subject matter and our understanding of "a part." Understanding is a movement back and forth between a sense of the whole and a sense of the part. What we are already familiar with (tradition, the past) gives us a framework for understanding the unfamiliar (the new, the present). In turn, one's understanding of the new in terms of the old leads to a different understanding of the old. Thus, the hermeneutical circle displays an ongoing dialectic between whole and part, the familiar and the unfamiliar, the old and the new, the past and the present.

A more specific theological hermeneutics is the discipline that examines the questing and questioning dynamic of "faith seeking understanding." Such questing and questioning in the academic discipline of theology is a

ten meanings: (1) capacity to perceive by the senses, sensation; (2) any one of the five physical senses; (3) an impression consequent on perception by the senses, sensation; (4) the faculties of perception (mental and physical); an impression on the mind, experience; (5) self-awareness, consciousness; awareness, consciousness (of situations, conditions); (6) the faculty of making distinctions, judgment, understanding; perception of what is appropriate, sensibility; the faculty of feeling emotions, heart; an undefined faculty, instinct; (7) a mental feeling, emotion; (8) one's feeling in regard to someone or something; character, disposition; (9) that which occurs to the mind, an idea, thought; the thought underlying an action, intention, purpose; an epigrammatic notion, concept; the sense, meaning (of a word or words; also of a writer); (10) a self-contained expression, a sentence or period.

⁷ For example, there is only one mention of the term in Avery Dulles, *The Assurance of Things Hoped For: A Theology of Christian Faith* (New York: Oxford University, 1994) 141.

⁸ See, for example, Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, rev. trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Crossroad, 1989).

process no less at work in the individual's life of believing.⁹ There is perhaps no more succinct definition of *sensus fidei* than this: *sensus fidei* is faith seeking understanding, interpretation, and application. For theological hermeneutics, the notion of the hermeneutical circle is helpful for outlining the dynamic relationship between revelation and faith, between revelation and Scripture, between Scripture and tradition, between past tradition and present experience.¹⁰ This circularity in understanding is particularly relevant for our discussion of *sensus fidei* with regard to two relationships: (1) the dynamic relationship between the faith of the individual and the faith of the ecclesial community; and (2) the dynamic relationship between *fides qua creditur* and *fides quae creditur*.

Firstly, while the faith of the Christian is always a received ecclesial faith, its reception by the individual is hermeneutically unique. In focusing in this article on the individual's *sensus fidei*, I do not wish to downplay the ecclesial nature of Christian faith. There exists in the individual-communal relationship a tension best described as a hermeneutical circle of understanding. An individual Christian's reception of the faith generally takes place within a Christian community which hands on "the faith" and enables the experience of Christian salvation to be recognized and named.¹¹ Paul reminds the Corinthians: "What do you have that you did not receive?" (1

⁹ Karl Rahner wrote: "Since the analysis by the hearer of what he is told is an inevitable moment in the process of hearing itself, and since utter non-understanding destroys even the hearing itself, *a certain degree of theology belongs as an inner moment to hearing itself*, and the mere hearing in faith is already a human activity in which man's own subjectivity, together with its logic, its experience, native concepts and perspectives, already enters into play. What we call theology and hence dogmatic statement in the strict sense is therefore merely a further development, an unfolding, of that basic subjective reflection which already takes place in the obedient listening to the Word of God, i.e. in faith as such. From this it follows, however, that dogmatic reflection and its statement can and must never separate themselves completely from the source from which they spring, i.e. from faith itself. This refers always, as has been said, not merely to the object of faith but also to its exercise. The latter remains the basis and support of the dogmatic statement as such itself" (Karl Rahner, "What is a Dogmatic Statement?" in *Theological Investigations* 5 [New York: Seabury, 1975] 42–66, at 49). Italics mine.

¹⁰ For one theologian's use of the notion of "the hermeneutical circle," see Clodovis Boff, *Theology and Praxis: Epistemological Foundations* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1987) 135–39 where he applies the notion to the relationship between (1) Scripture and the word of God, (2) the creation and the perception of meaning, (3) structure and meaning, (4) present and past, and (5) *techne hermeneutike* and *hermeneia*.

¹¹ See Richard R. Gaillardetz, *Teaching with Authority: A Theology of the Magisterium in the Church* (Collegeville: Liturgical, 1997) 256, who writes: "[A]s Christians, we do not profess a private faith. The act of faith, while certainly personal in character, is also communal. Just as it is a mistake to isolate discrete teaching acts of the magisterium from the life of the Church, so too is it misguided to isolate the

Corinthians 4:7). The ecclesial context of this traditioning of “the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3) is most clearly modeled in the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*. Here the faith is absorbed by catechumens and candidates through their coming to know and love those already Christians, through hearing of their experiences of salvation and listening to what the faith means to them. While they study the witness of Scripture and the teachings of the Church, the lives of the saints and the lives of those around them are proposed to them as living statements of what the faith means for daily life. In formal ritual, those to be initiated have the Scriptures and the creed “handed over” to them and in turn they assent to “the faith which is to be believed” (*fides quae creditur*). “This is our faith; this is the faith of the Church.” The fullest reception of the faith occurs in the reception of the Eucharist when, in communion with Christ, they are in communion with one another and with the world-wide community of believers since the beginning of the Church. After their ecclesial initiation, lest inadequate understanding and indeed misunderstanding cloud their perception of the truth, ongoing reflection on the meaning of the sacraments and constant study of “the faith” are necessary to deepen further their initiation into the triune mystery. Since the early Church the Christian faith has been traditioned in this way from generation to generation. An individual Christian’s faith finds its home in the faith of the Church. The *sensus fidei fidelis* is nourished out of the *sensus fidei fidelium* and in turn nourishes the community’s faith. The faith of the individual is received from the community and includes creedal assent to the community’s beliefs during the process of baptismal initiation. Thus, by focusing more narrowly in this essay on the individual’s understanding of the faith, I do not wish to deny this ecclesial nature of Christian faith, but simply to propose a way of conceiving an individual’s “faith seeking understanding, interpretation and application.”

Secondly, the hermeneutical circle is helpful for avoiding any sharp separation between faith as relationship and faith as assent. *Fides qua creditur* is faith seen as a personal response by the individual to God’s self-communication. It is the act or activity of faith; it is faith as believing. *Fides quae creditur* names the dimension of faith as an assent to the content of beliefs taught by the Church, that which is to be believed, “the faith.”

response of the individual believer to Church teaching from the corporate reception of Church doctrine by the whole people of God. The character and significance of an individual’s response to Church teaching both influences and is influenced by the ecclesial community. The response of the active Christian committed to an ecclesial community cannot be the same as the response of a Christian who lives on the periphery of an ecclesial community. This is the important point made by many who resent the presentation of Gallup polls as if their findings constituted the *sensus fidelium*. Such polls fail to acknowledge the importance of ecclesial context.”

These two dimensions of faith may be distinguished but not separated. Given the circularity of understanding outlined above between whole and part, past and present, the old and the new, tradition and present experience, a Christian individual's believing in God is already informed by received symbols, metaphors, narratives, categories, concepts, rituals, and experiences. These elements form the framework out of which an individual is able to recognize and interpret "the religious dimension of human experience."¹² How one experiences faith as a personal relationship of trust and intimacy will be conditioned to a significant degree by particular beliefs already held about God. New experiences of God, shaped by already held beliefs, in turn will "correct" one's previous interpretation of those beliefs and thereby enrich future possible experiences. *Sensus fidei*, I will propose, arises out of this hermeneutical circle of understanding between *fides qua creditur* (faith seen as a response by the individual person to God's self-communication) and *fides quae creditur* (faith as an assent to the content of beliefs taught by the Church).¹³

The Question

Without using the actual phrase, the New Testament alludes to a capacity for sensing the faith that comes from the Holy Spirit.¹⁴ It is the Holy Spirit who enables the believer to perceive and receive God's salvific offer.¹⁵ For example, the fourth evangelist speaks of another Advocate who

¹² See John E. Smith, *Experience and God* (New York: Fordham University, 1995).

¹³ Avery Dulles writes of the dialectic between understanding and assent to beliefs: "Faith and understanding, therefore, enter into a dialectical unity. Understanding and believing are not identical, but it is when I believe that I best understand, and it is when I understand that I believe most fully as I should. The Christian is convinced that the beliefs of his own tradition are capable of leading to the fullest and highest understanding available to man" (Avery Dulles, *The Survival of Dogma: Faith, Authority, and Dogma in a Changing World* [New York: Crossroad, 1987] 43). I am grateful for the helpful comments of Bradford Hinze on this section concerning the importance of a "thick description" of faith as believing and as beliefs.

¹⁴ Salvador Pié-Ninot, "Sensus fidei," in *Dictionary of Fundamental Theology*, ed. René Latourelle and Rino Fisichella (Middlegreen, Slough, UK: St. Pauls, 1994) 992–95, at 993 writes: "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." For an overview of the New Testament witness to this reality in the individual and community, 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.

¹⁵ For a comprehensive presentation of pneumatology and the Spirit's gift of understanding, see especially the first volume of Yves Congar, *I Believe in the Holy*

would anoint disciples and lead them to the fullness of truth.¹⁶ Indeed, because of that anointing, they have no need of any other teacher (1 John 2:27). From Colossians, we read of the gift of “spiritual insight” (Col 1:9). The writer of the letter to the Ephesians prays that his community may have a capacity to perceive revelation.

May the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, give you a spirit of wisdom and perception of what is revealed (*apokalypsis*), to bring you to full knowledge (*epignosis*) of him. May he enlighten the eyes of your mind so that you can see what hope his call holds for you, what rich glories he has promised the saints will inherit and how infinitely great is the power he has exercised for us believers (Eph 1:17–19).

This biblical witness continues to be affirmed throughout the history of the Church.¹⁷ In the patristic writings one finds recurring expressions such as “the eyes of the heart,” “the eyes of the spirit,” and “the eyes of faith.” Augustine asserts: “After all, faith has its eyes.”¹⁸ Aquinas talks of “the light of faith,”¹⁹ an expression retrieved by Pierre Rousselot in his 1910 seminal article “The Eyes of Faith.”²⁰ At the conclusion of his apostolic

Spirit (New York: Crossroad, 1997). See also James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit: A Study of the Religious and Charismatic Experience of Jesus and the First Christians as Reflected in the New Testament* (London: SCM, 1975) esp. 212–25.

¹⁶ See John 14:26 (“But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you.”); John 16:12–14 (“I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.”)

¹⁷ The Second Council of Orange in 529 taught the necessity of “the illumination and inspiration of the Holy Spirit” for faith (DS 377). For surveys of the history of theology on this issue, see Finucane, *Sensus Fidelium* 17–209; Wolfgang Beinert, “Der Glaubenssinn der Gläubigen in Theologie- und Dogmengeschichte: Ein Überblick,” in *Der Glaubenssinn des Gottesvolkes: Konkurrent oder Partner des Lehramts?* ed. Dietrich Wiederkehr (Freiburg: Herder, 1994) 66–131.

¹⁸ “Habet namque fides oculos suos.” *Epist.* 120.2.8 [PL 33.458].

¹⁹ “Through the light of faith, they see that these things are to be believed.” *ST* 2-2, q.1, a.5, ad 1. For this and the above patristic references, I am dependent on Pié-Ninot, “Sensus fidei” 993.

²⁰ Published in English as *The Eyes of Faith* (New York: Fordham University, 1990). Commenting on the significance of Rousselot for contemporary theologies of faith, Dulles writes: “For Rousselot the light of faith is something by which we see, not something seen. It is, in Scholastic terminology, an *obiectum quo*, not an *obiectum quod*. It gives us the ‘eyes of faith’ . . . He deserves credit for reviving the doctrine of Thomas Aquinas that the grace of faith is a light—an active power of discernment—given to the mind of God, and that it instills in the soul a vital connaturality with the things of God. Rousselot’s theory, better than most others,

exhortation *Catechesi tradendae* no. 72, John Paul II neatly summarizes ecclesial belief concerning the role of the Holy Spirit in enabling the individual believer to come to an understanding of the faith:

The Spirit is . . . promised to the Church and to each Christian as a Teacher within, who, in the secret of the conscience and the heart, makes one understand what one has heard but was not capable of grasping: "Even now the Holy Spirit teaches the faithful," said Saint Augustine in this regard, "in accordance with each one's spiritual capacity. And he sets their hearts aflame with greater desire according as each one progresses in the charity that makes him love what he already knows and desire what he has yet to know."²¹

What is this "spirit of wisdom and perception of what is revealed" (Ephesians 1:17), bringing the believer to "full knowledge" of God? How can we understand this perception by "the eyes of your mind"?

In a cluster of related articles, Karl Rahner discusses a problem closely connected to this issue. Most Catholics, Rahner claims, would not know a fraction of what is in Denzinger-Schönmetzer, let alone explicitly assent to all the beliefs formulated by the Church.²² In practice, he asserts, there is often a discrepancy between "what the Church officially teaches and what the people actually believe."²³ Nevertheless, despite this, he says, Christians' reception of revelation can still be "a faith which leads them to salvation and (given the further assumptions) justification, even though the

gives intelligibility to the strong affirmations of Orange II regarding the impossibility of advancing toward faith without the help of grace. It also brings into Scholastic theology the insights of Newman regarding the logic of convergence" (Avery Dulles, *The Assurance of Things Hoped For* 111).

²¹ Quoting Augustine, *In Ioannis Evangelium Tractatus*, 97, 1: PL 35.1877.

²² For example, see Karl Rahner, "Pluralism in Theology and the Unity of the Creed in the Church," *Theological Investigations* 11 (New York: Crossroad, 1974) 3–23; "Heresies in the Church Today?" *Theological Investigations* 12 (New York: Crossroad, 1974) 117–41; "The Faith of the Christian and the Doctrine of the Church," *Theological Investigations* 14 (New York: Crossroad, 1976) 24–46; "A Hierarchy of Truths," *Theological Investigations* 21 (New York: Crossroad, 1988) 162–67; "The Act of Faith and the Content of Faith," *ibid.* 151–61; "What the Church Officially Teaches and What the People Actually Believe," *Theological Investigations* 22 (New York: Crossroad, 1991) 165–75; "The Relation Between Theology and Popular Religion," *ibid.* 140–47.

²³ See Rahner, "What the Church Officially Teaches and What the People Actually Believe." Regarding the central doctrine of the Trinity, Rahner comments: "[D]espite their orthodox confession of the Trinity, Christians are, in their practical life, almost mere 'monotheists.' We must be willing to admit that, should the doctrine of the Trinity have to be dropped as false, the major part of religious literature could well remain unchanged. . . . One has the feeling that, for the catechism of the head and heart (as contrasted with the printed catechism), the Christian's idea of the incarnation would not have to change at all if there were no Trinity" (Karl Rahner, *The Trinity* [New York: Herder and Herder, 1970] 10–11).

contents of their faith, their *fides quae*, are of the most diverse and often contradictory kind.”²⁴

My reflections on the nature of *sensus fidei* constantly brought me back to another passage by Rahner, in his article “The Adult Christian,” where he wrote:

Today’s Christians face the problems of synthesizing their faith with all they know and experience as individuals. To this end, they must differentiate between more and less binding church teachings . . . The formed Christian must be aware of the “hierarchy of truths,” must know the effectively central and existentially meaningful roots of the faith so as to deepen this understanding and, while not denying, pay less attention to what is secondary. Formed Christians must find their own idea of God and of eternal salvation in Jesus Christ. Not knowing exactly how many sacraments there are needn’t be all that bad, for despite such dearth of information we are still quite capable of correctly resolving our burdened consciences.²⁵

Is this what *sensus fidei* is: a Spirit-given capacity that Christians possess, which enables them, within the struggle of their daily lives, to “find their own idea of God and of eternal salvation in Jesus Christ”? *Sensus fidei*, I will propose, is such an imaginative capacity with which, within their daily reception of God’s self-communication, Christians, in some relatively adequate way (at least adequate in terms of salvation), “make sense of” their lives and “make sense of” the God reaching out to them in their lives through Christ in the Spirit.

There is a double meaning to the word *sensus* that I wish to retain. Firstly, *sensus fidei* is a Spirit-given sense or capacity or faculty or ability possessed by the individual baptized and committed Christian that enables understanding, interpretation and application of God’s self-revelation.²⁶ It is a “sixth sense” or a “spiritual sense,” analogous to the five physical senses. The Spirit’s gift of this *sensus fidei* enables the faithful baptized believer to understand, to make sense of, revelation.

Secondly, this *sensus*, as well as being a capacity, is the particular sense that an individual makes of God’s revelation in and through a personal

²⁴ Rahner, “The Act of Faith and the Content of Faith” 152.

²⁵ Karl Rahner, “Reflections on the Adult Christian,” *Theology Digest* 31 (1984) 125. The last two sentences from the original German article read: “Ein gebildeter Christ muß sich einen Begriff von Gott, von seinem in Jesus Christus begründeten ewigen Heil machen. Wenn er nicht genau weiß, was ein Ablass ist, oder die Zahl der Sakramente nicht weiß, braucht das noch nicht schlimm zu sein. Mit einer solchen Ökonomie seiner expliziten Bewußtseinsinhalte kann der Mensch durchaus mit Recht sein ungeheuer belastetes und überfülltes Bewußtsein entlasten” (Karl Rahner, “Der mündige Christ,” *Stimmen der Zeit* 200 [1982] 3–13).

²⁶ 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” (Pié-Ninot, “Sensus fidei” 992).

reception. One's *sensus fidei* is an individual's understanding, interpretation, and application of the faith. It would be captured if they had to explain their faith to another person. For example, each individual has a particular understanding of the doctrine of transubstantiation and its meaning for daily life. It may or may not cohere adequately with a scholarly interpretation of the doctrine. However, as Rahner claims, it may no doubt be adequate for their salvation. "Sense" is here used as synonymous with "meaning," and relates to the knowledge of faith as *fides quae*, that which is believed and expressed.²⁷

Thus I will speak of *sensus fidei* as both (1) an imaginative capacity, enabled by the Holy Spirit, to recognize and "make sense of" revelation, as well as (2) the particular "sense" or understanding one has of revelation and its contents. The term can refer therefore to both (1) the process of faith understanding, and (2) the understanding of the faith that emerges from the process. These two likewise exist in a relationship best captured by the notion of the hermeneutical circle of understanding. Throughout this article I hope to develop both uses of the term, highlighting the active nature of the reception of revelation in terms of the "poietic imagination."

THE SUBJECT AND OBJECT OF *SENSUS FIDEI*

Given these preliminary statements, we can now address the questions: who is the subject and what is the object of *sensus fidei*?²⁸ With regard to the subject who possesses this capacity, I will restrict my inquiry. Although one could fruitfully investigate the *sensus fidei* of a Buddhist or Moslem or Hindu, I limit myself here to Christian faith. To narrow my focus in this way is not to deny the effective promptings of the Holy Spirit in individuals outside the Christian churches, nor within the lives of believers in other religions, nor indeed in the lives of agnostics and atheists. But such a discussion would require another work. For the purposes of this study, then, the subject of the *sensus fidei* is a baptized and committed Christian who in an act of faith (*fides qua*) responds to God's outreach through

²⁷ 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*," *Concilium* 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'" (ibid.).

²⁸ For a discussion of the object and subject of *sensus fidei*, see Dario Vitali, *Sensus fidelium: Una funzione ecclesiale di intelligenza della fede* (Brescia: Morcelliana, 1993).

Christ in the power of the Spirit and participates in the sacramental life of a community of faith and its wider mission in the world. My proposal applies, I believe, to both child and adult Christians, and to both Christians with little theological education and those with a sophisticated theological framework.

Secondly, what is the object toward which this capacity is oriented? *Sensus fidei* is a dimension of faith. In all theological knowing, revelation is the objective principle and faith is the subjective principle.²⁹ Faith, understood in its meaning as *fides qua*, is the individual's reception of the divine word of revelation, i.e., God's address to humanity through Christ in the Spirit. This revelatory encounter is also a salvific encounter, since to be drawn into the trinitarian life of God is to know the fullness of human well-being. Perhaps it would therefore be better to refer always to this event as "salvific revelation" or as "revelatory salvation," rather than simply "revelation." This divine self-communication requires reception by faith for its realization. Revelation is not achieved until it is received.³⁰ As Heinrich Fries stated: "Faith is answered revelation. Accepted revelation is faith. Faith is revelation arrived at its goal."³¹ To highlight this interrelationship between revelation and faith, Paul Tillich preferred to speak of *Offenbarungsglaube* (revelation-faith).³² It is this *fides qua*, Rahner claims, which is "a faith which leads [believers] to salvation and (given the further assumptions) justification, even though the contents of their faith, their *fides quae*, are of the most diverse and often contradictory kind."³³

The object of *sensus fidei*, therefore, is ultimately the revelatory and salvific event of God's self-communication in history, i.e., revelation itself. This holds true for faith as *fides quae*. Thomas Aquinas reminds us that

²⁹ On "the word of God" as the objective principle of theological epistemology, see Otto Hermann Pesch, "Das Wort Gottes als objektives Prinzip der theologischen Erkenntnis," in *Handbuch der Fundamentaltheologie*, ed. Walter Kern, Hermann J. Pottmeyer and Max Seckler (Freiburg: Herder, 1988) 4.27–50; on "revelation" as the objective principle of theological epistemology, see Wolfgang Beinert, "Theologische Erkenntnislehre," in *Glaubenszugänge: Lehrbuch der Katholischen Dogmatik*, ed. Wolfgang Beinert (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1995), 1.55–73. I use "word of God" and "revelation" synonymously in referring to the objective principle of theological knowledge.

³⁰ Vorgrimler summarizing Rahner, states: "God's revelation is only heard if his self-communication is experienced and accepted, and not as a theory, but, far more radically, in the existential mode of human life" (Vorgrimler, "From *Sensus fidei* to *Consensus Fidelium*" 7).

³¹ Heinrich Fries, *Fundamental Theology* (Washington: Catholic University of America, 1996) 182. See also Dan O. Via, *The Revelation of God and/as Human Reception in the New Testament* (Harrisburg, Penn.: Trinity, 1997).

³² *Frühe Hauptwerke* (Stuttgart, 1959) 353; quoted in Gerald O'Collins, *Foundations of Theology* (Chicago: Loyola University, 1971) 33.

³³ Rahner, "The Act of Faith and the Content of Faith" 152.

articles or propositions of faith are never the ultimate objects of faith, “for the act of the believer does not terminate in the proposition [*enuntiabile*] but in the reality [signified by the proposition].”³⁴

In summary, despite the possible discrepancy between what the Church officially teaches and what the people actually believe, to the persons who respond in the depths of their being to God’s offer of revelatory salvation the Holy Spirit grants a “sense of the faith.”

THE PRIMARY CONTEXT OF *SENSUS FIDEI*

Lest talk of faith become too abstract, we need to ask: what is the locus of such a faith and its consequent *sensus*? The primary context of *sensus fidei* is Christian experience of salvific revelation in everyday life and celebration of the sacraments.³⁵ *Lumen gentium* no. 35 speaks of the laity’s *sensus fidei*, which ensures that the power of the gospel shines out in daily family and social life.³⁶ Furthermore, in a passage that refers to the three ways in which the apostolic tradition progresses with the help of the Holy Spirit, *Dei Verbum* refers to, in addition to theology and the magisterium, “the intimate sense of spiritual realities which [believers] experience [*ex intima spiritualium rerum quam experiuntur intelligentia*]” (no. 8). Commentators agree that the sentence is intended as an alternative expression

³⁴ *ST*, 2–2, q. 1, a. 2, ad 2. For a discussion of Aquinas on this point, see Avery Dulles, *The Assurance of Things Hoped For* 33–36; 193. See also *ST*, 2–2, q. 1, a. 6: “Articulus [fidei] est perceptio divinae veritatis tendens in ipsam [veritatem].”

³⁵ See Harald Wagner, “Glaubenssinn, Glaubenszustimmung und Glaubenskonsensus,” *Theologie und Glaube* 69 (1979) 263–71, esp. 265–67. See also Gaillardetz, *Teaching with Authority* 271: “In the end, one’s response to Church teaching can never be reduced to a simple matter of assent or dissent. To the extent that one’s response to Church teaching is a truly personal response, *the definitive character of that response is ultimately disclosed only in the concrete shape of a believer’s life*. Just as the true nature of Church doctrine is only discovered within the context of a rich Christian tradition that passes on God’s word in innumerable forms, the true nature of the Christian’s response to that doctrine is interwoven in the daily life of Christian discipleship. It is there, in the ongoing struggle to remain faithful as followers of Jesus, that we give our most profound answer to God’s invitation to saving communion which is faithfully if imperfectly communicated to us in Christian doctrine.” (italics mine)

³⁶ “Christ is the great prophet who proclaimed the kingdom of the Father both by the testimony of his life and the power of his word. Until the full manifestation of his glory, he fulfils this prophetic office, not only through the hierarchy who teach in his name and by his power, but also through the laity. He accordingly both establishes them as witnesses and provides them with an appreciation of the faith [*sensus fidei*] and the grace of the word (see Acts 2:17–18; Apoc 19:10) so that the power of the Gospel may shine out in daily family and social life” (*Lumen gentium* no. 35). See also John Paul II, *Christifideles laici* no. 14.

of the reality *sensus fidei* referred to in *Lumen gentium* no. 12.³⁷ As Dario Vitali points out, the correlation of *Lumen gentium* no. 12 and *Dei Verbum* no. 8 demands that we locate *sensus fidei* within Christians' personal experience of salvific revelation.³⁸

According to Zoltán Alszeghy, *Dei Verbum*'s phrase "spiritual realities" is to be interpreted as referring to "intimate participation in the life of Christ," i.e., to experience of the object of the *sensus fidei*, revelation itself, the Christ event.³⁹ Within such intimate participation, revelation attains its goal. Here salvation is freely received and experienced as a transforming reality. In Christ, the believer experiences revelation and salvation. The Christian "knows" intimately the realities of which church doctrine speaks and which the sacraments celebrate. On this level, as Beinert states, the *sensus fidei* is more akin to the knowledge of a person one loves.⁴⁰ Believers possess, as Aquinas puts it, a connaturality with God as Mystery.⁴¹ Newman would liken it to an "illative sense."⁴² Tillard's definition highlights its gift for critical discernment in daily life:

Being the consequence of the presence in the Church of the Spirit which inspired the prophets, Jesus, the apostles, [*sensus fidei*] is a kind of flair, a "spiritual sense," an *instinctus* which makes one living a life faithful to the Gospel grasp instinctively what is in harmony with the authentic meaning of the Word of God and what deviates from it. It is like a life of friendship in which one grasps instinctively what cheats it, the words which kill it, the falsehood of empty gestures. It is also like that by which the musical ear recognizes the right or wrong note. Often without really knowing why, or not being able to justify his reaction rationally, the Christian loyal to the faith and whose life is fully impregnated by the Gospel perceives that such and such a statement jars, is out of tune, that there is something amiss with such and such a decision.⁴³

However, there is perhaps no more problematic word in the philosophical and theological vocabulary than "experience." Already we have dis-

³⁷ See Zoltán Alszeghy, "The Sensus Fidei and the Development of Dogma," in *Vatican II Assessment and Perspectives: Twenty-Five Years After (1962–1987)*, ed. René Latourelle (New York: Paulist, 1988) 1.138–56; Pié-Ninot, "Sensus fidei" 992–95; Vitali, *Sensus fidelium* 263–66.

³⁸ Vitali, *Sensus fidelium* 241–72.

³⁹ Alszeghy, "Sensus Fidei" 147.

⁴⁰ Wolfgang Beinert, "Theologische Erkenntnislehre" 168.

⁴¹ See John W. Glaser, "Authority, Connatural Knowledge, and the Spontaneous Judgment of the Faithful," *Theological Studies* 29 (1968) 742–51.

⁴² John Henry Cardinal Newman, *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1979).

⁴³ J. M. R. Tillard, "Church and Apostolic Tradition," *Mid-Stream* 39 (1990) 248. Alszeghy similarly writes: "The *sensus fidei* is precisely this capacity to recognize the intimate experience of adherence to Christ and to judge everything on the basis of this knowledge" (Alszeghy, "The Sensus Fidei and the Development of Dogma" 147).

cussed how the elements in the hermeneutical triad of understanding, interpretation, and application are to be distinguished but not separated. Every experience of understanding is already an interpretation by means of a familiar framework, and already an application to present context. We bring a past into our present *that enables us to experience it*. Therefore there is a narrative quality to experience; we are always experiencing the present out of our past, the new out of the old. Furthermore, we narrate the past out of the present, and see the old in terms of the new. “The formal quality of experience through time is inherently narrative.”⁴⁴ The hermeneutical point I want to highlight here is that all experience is interpretative experience.⁴⁵ We are always coming from somewhere, whether it be from the past or in the present. How we see things depends on where we have been and where we are now standing, with its own unique perspective. Both our interpreting framework and our perspective are at the same time enabling and limiting.

So too, at the deepest level of an individual’s faith response to God’s self-communication, experience of such an encounter is already an interpretation from a certain horizon. One’s *understanding* of the faith is already an *interpretation* created out of one’s past horizon or context, and such interpretative understanding is already an *application* to one’s life context. The content of faith is understood in terms of one’s unique life story. A Christian senses the faith only from a particular framework inherited from the past which conditions their perspective of the faith in the present and how they could act on it in the future.

Two hermeneutical points can be made about *sensus fidei*, both as a capacity and as the resulting perception. Firstly, it is the capacity of *sensus fidei* that bridges the hermeneutical gap between past and present. It enables “the faith” to be constantly rejuvenated. Secondly, *sensus fidei*, as the sense one has of the faith, can be defined as an individual’s “interpretative experience” of revelatory salvation. That interpretative experience is constituted by the specific location, perspective, or context of the individual believer. We sense God from a particular place. Across a worldwide Church, revelation (and the salvific encounter it mediates) is received from a great variety of horizons and applied in a vast plurality of ways. Whatever the particularity (class, race, gender, culture, language, age, personal history, and psychological type), how a person experiences revelatory salvation in Christ will be conditioned by who they are and what they personally

⁴⁴ Stephen Crites, “The Narrative Quality of Experience,” in *Why Narrative? Readings in Narrative Theology*, ed. Stanley Hauerwas and L. G. Jones (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989) 65–88, at 66.

⁴⁵ On interpretative experience, see Edward Schillebeeckx, *Christ: The Experience of Jesus as Lord* (New York: Seabury, 1980) 29–64.

need to be saved from in their societal context. In a very concrete sense, revelatory salvation is experienced differently by each individual. In that way, salvation is tailor-made for each individual. Thus, the emergent *sensus fidei* will be unique to each individual. *Sensus fidei* is a concrete sense.

This is true not only at the level of *fides qua*. At the level of *fides quae*, as Rahner highlights, Christians may interpret the same doctrine in a plurality of ways.⁴⁶ Indeed, he says, every believer creates a concrete catechism, which is necessarily a selection of beliefs for this or that concrete situation. Each individual, he says, operates out of “an ‘existentiell’ hierarchy of truths which is not simply the equivalent of the objective hierarchy of truths.”⁴⁷ This is not to say that any inadequate understanding of a doctrine does not need to be constantly addressed by the ecclesial community through catechesis and faith development programs, in order that the doctrine may better illumine Christians’ experience. But even given optimum education, diversity in interpretation will still remain, and indeed cannot be avoided. It is the concreteness and distinctiveness of both a person’s *fides qua* and *fides quae* which enables a sense of the faith that is grounded in their Christian experience. The capacity of *sensus fidei* applies doctrine to life; the concrete meaning of doctrine for one’s unique life is the resultant *sensus fidei*.

THE PRIMARY MODE OF *SENSUS FIDEI*

The Spirit-activated capacity of *sensus fidei* calls upon the heuristic and integrative resources of the “poietic” imagination, its primary mode of operating.⁴⁸ According to Paul Ricoeur, “the imagination can be consid-

⁴⁶ Rahner writes: “The differences in the structures that form the concrete framework for faith are quite justifiable, and that applies to the *fides quae* as well as the *fides qua*. It is quite legitimate, since it is absolutely unavoidable, for the truths of faith to be present throughout the world in different ways in the consciousness of faith, sometimes moving to the foreground of this consciousness, sometimes receding to the background, since the persons possessing this faith are themselves different. There are age differences, differences in the times in which they lead their lives, sociological differences, personal differences, and so on” (Rahner, “A Hierarchy of Truths” 165–66).

⁴⁷ Rahner, “A Hierarchy of Truths” 165. According to Leo O’Donovan, the German adjective *existentiell*, as used by Rahner, refers to “existence in the concrete and to the ways in which the structures of human existence are given concrete content. ‘Existentiell Christology’, for example, is a person’s lived faith relationship to Jesus Christ as distinguished from general concepts or doctrines about him” (Leo J. O’Donovan, ed., *A World of Grace: An Introduction to the Themes and Foundations of Karl Rahner’s Theology* [New York: Seabury, 1980] 191).

⁴⁸ I prefer to use the transliteration “poietic” rather than “poetic” in order to highlight the primary sense of the Greek word *poiesis* as “creating,” “making,” or “doing.”

ered as the power of giving form to human experience.”⁴⁹ Just as the imagination is not one “faculty” but rather “the whole mind working in certain ways,”⁵⁰ so too *sensus fidei* is the whole mind of the Christian working in certain ways. The exercise of the capacity of *sensus fidei* is an exercise of the creative Christian imagination.

There now falls across our discussion what William M. Thompson has called “the ‘Bañez-Molina shadow’ of the *sensus fidelium*.”⁵¹ In describing the interaction between God’s grace and human response, where should the emphasis lie? On divine priority, freedom, and initiative? Or, on human response, responsibility, and involvement? Various models proposed throughout the history of theology have portrayed the sides of the divine-human polarity either actively or passively. How the encounter is modeled will condition one’s theology of revelation, grace, creation, incarnation, sacraments, indeed every area of theology. Here we are concerned with the theology of revelation and faith. With regard to the cognitive aspect of revelation-faith, is God’s revelatory activity somehow outside the normal human processes of understanding? Or does revelation require human processes of understanding for its realization?

Noting the etymological similarity of the words “revelation” and “discovery” in their reference to “disclosure,” Avery Dulles proposes “that revelation can be brought within the category of discovery, and that it may even be defined as a gifted discovery.”⁵² The reception of revelation, he

⁴⁹ Paul Ricoeur, “The Bible and the Imagination,” in *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative, and Imagination* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995) 144–66, at 144.

⁵⁰ John McIntyre, *Faith, Theology and Imagination* (Edinburgh: Handsel, 1987) 159.

⁵¹ William M. Thompson, “Sensus Fidelium and Infallibility,” *American Ecclesiastical Review* 167 (1973) 479. During the 16th-century “*de auxiliis*” controversy over “the helps” toward salvation, the Dominican Domingo Banez placed emphasis on the efficacy of divine grace, while the Jesuit Luis de Molina emphasized the free and active participation of the human will. The controversy ended with papal approval for the legitimacy of both approaches.

⁵² Avery Dulles, “Revelation and Discovery,” in *Theology and Discovery* (Milwaukee: Marquette University, 1980) 1–29, at 2. Dulles makes subtle distinctions between revelation, faith and discovery: “Faith is not the same as revelation. It is not even directly correlated with revelation, as I have been using the term. For revelation, in the sense of discovery, is an insight in which the mind rests satisfied. Faith, however, is a stretching forth toward an insight not yet given. Faith animates the quest for revelation; it sustains the process of discovery; but to the extent that discovery or revelation is given, faith is supplanted. Faith, therefore, stands in dialectical tension with discovery, and hence also with revelation. The completeness of revelation, if it were ever given (as the asymptotic goal of revelation within our pilgrim condition), would do away with the very possibility of faith” (“Revelation and Discovery” 25). Here I am indebted to Richard Gaillardetz for alerting me to

claims, is “a heuristic process,” similar to a scientist’s quest for discovery.⁵³ In Newman’s discussion of apprehension, assent, certitude, inference and the “illative sense,” he refers to the art of a detective who successfully recognizes and interprets the clues, and to the art of a lawyer who sees in the evidence a pattern which others miss.⁵⁴ Jesus spoke of those who “cannot interpret the signs of the times” (Matthew 16:3). Revelation requires “eyes of faith” for divine manifestation to occur. It requires the eyes of faith to disclose what remains unrecognized by eyes that do not see, by ears that do not hear (Mark 8:18). It requires a sense for the Invisible.⁵⁵ *Sensus fidei* is such a heuristic sense.

Discovery requires attentiveness; and attentiveness demands what Walter J. Burghardt calls “a long loving look at the real.”⁵⁶ *Sensus fidei*, as a sense for the divine, engages in its search the five physical senses of touch, taste, smell, hearing, and sight as antennae alert to the divine presence. Through an active *sensus fidei*, the believer may “taste and see the goodness of the Lord” (Ps 34:8). *Sensus fidei*, as faith’s capacity for discovery of revelation, pays attention to all things, expectant that anything (a tortured man on a cross?) can be a symbol mediating the divine. *Sensus fidei* then is an active sense forever on the lookout for God. Not only in liturgy,

the relevance of Dulles’s discussion on discovery and revelation for explicating the heuristic function of *sensus fidei*.

⁵³ “Revelation and Discovery” 3–10. Elsewhere, Dulles writes of discovery in terms of Polanyi’s “logic of discovery” and Newman’s “illative sense” which discovers “patterns of intelligibility that point to a divinely given meaning. There is no way of strictly proving that the meaning is really there. Either one recognizes it or one does not. As we contemplate the scene, there seem to be moments when the pieces fall into a pattern. It is as though the meaning were given to us; we perceive it as a gift, a grace. And yet we cannot say that reason is not at work. The illative sense reasons in its own way” (Dulles, *The Survival of Dogma* 40).

⁵⁴ “We often hear of the exploits of some great lawyer, judge or advocate, who is able in perplexed cases, when common minds see nothing but a hopeless heap of facts, foreign or contrary to each other, to detect the principle which rightly interprets the riddle, and, to the admiration of all hearers, converts a chaos into an orderly and luminous whole. This is what is meant by originality in thinking: it is the discovery of an aspect of a subject-matter, simpler, it may be, and more intelligible than any hitherto taken” (Newman, *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent* 291). On Newman, see John Coulson, *Religion and Imagination: “In Aid of a Grammar of Assent”* (New York: Oxford University, 1981). See also, Thomas Carr, *Newman and Gadamer: Towards a Hermeneutics of Religious Knowledge* (Atlanta: Scholars, 1996).

⁵⁵ Hebrews 11:27 speaks of Moses’ faith which radiated forth from him “like someone who could see the Invisible” (New Jerusalem Bible translation).

⁵⁶ Walter J. Burghardt, “Contemplation: A Long Loving Look at the Real,” *Church* 6 (1989) 14–18.

surely, but in the whole of human existence, *sensus fidei* is engagement of the imagination in God's process of symbolically mediated self-communication with "full, conscious and active participation."⁵⁷ Paying attention leads to noticing; noticing leads to recognition; recognition leads to disclosure.

In the individual's discovery and reception of divine revelation, there is an active, human element that is co-constitutive of the sense or meaning of revelation *as experienced*. God not only reveals but also invites us to understand; "everything he does, he gives us to do."⁵⁸ The revealing God is at work in the activity of human interpretation. In the disclosive and communicative process of revelation, God's Holy Spirit is the "go-between" who lures the receiver to make sense of what is communicated.⁵⁹ But equally, the human receiver is creatively involved in the actualization of the communication. Revelation is not achieved until it is received.

To understand this dynamic of communication, it may be helpful to conceive of religious experience as analogous to esthetic experience, and to conceive of *sensus fidei* as analogous to an individual's appreciation of a work of art.⁶⁰ Following that analogy, the Latin word *sensus* is best translated into Greek as *aisthesis* (perception), from which comes the word "esthetics."⁶¹ Thus the *sensus fidei* or *aisthesis piteos* construed by the recipient of revelation is analogous to the constructive *aisthesis* or perception by the recipient of a work of art.

If the analogy is appropriate, then a reception esthetics can here provide a relevant background theory for our exploration of the nature and function of *sensus fidei*. For an esthetics from the perspective of reception, the reader, viewer or listener of a work of art is a "co-creator" of the work's meaning as art, along with the original creator of the work.⁶² The *poiesis*

⁵⁷ *Sacrosanctum concilium* no. 14.

⁵⁸ Thompson, "Sensus Fidelium and Infallibility" 479.

⁵⁹ John V. Taylor, *The Go-Between God: The Holy Spirit and the Christian Mission* (New York: Oxford University, 1972). On St. Paul's pneumatology, Dulles writes: "In modern terminology we might say that the Holy Spirit functions for Paul as constituting a new horizon whereby reason is enabled to transcend itself and achieve a discovery beyond its normal capacity" (Dulles, "Revelation and Discovery" 17).

⁶⁰ Beinert, for example, uses the analogies of esthetic experience and human love. See "Theologische Erkenntnislehre" 167–68. For a discussion from the field of cognitive psychology on the analogous relationship between esthetic and religious experience, see T. Watts, and M. Williams, *The Psychology of Religious Knowing* (New York: Cambridge University, 1988) 59–62.

⁶¹ See *Lexicon Graeco-Latinum et Latino-Graecum*, ed. Benjamin Hederico (Rome: Congregatio de Propaganda Fide, 1832) 29.

⁶² For a theological appropriation of reception esthetics as a fruitful background theory for this issue, see Rush, *The Reception of Doctrine*.

(“creating” or “making”) on the part of the original producer requires a corresponding *poiesis* on the part of the receiver, if the work is to achieve its effect. The receiver is needed actively to “make sense” of the work. Music demands an active listener. A novel is dead until it is read. Each recipient brings to the encounter a horizon of expectation, which enables it to be an esthetic experience through which meaningful communication takes place. Such a making-meaning-of-the-work is achieved by those interlocking processes of the mind which together we call “the imagination.” This imagining is poietic (i.e., involves a *poiesis*) since it makes sense of and gives meaning to the work by “putting the pieces together’ into a coherent whole.

In faith’s making-sense of revelation, this integrative poietic imagination is no less at work. In the felicitous expression of Michael Paul Gallagher, “ultimately it is through imagination that we cope with the difficult docking manoeuvre between a hidden God and a fallen humanity.”⁶³

Much recent work has been done on the role of imagination in faith, especially by writers such as William Lynch,⁶⁴ Ray Hart,⁶⁵ David Tracy,⁶⁶ John McIntyre,⁶⁷ Garrett Green,⁶⁸ Sandra Schneiders,⁶⁹ David Bryant,⁷⁰ Michael Cook,⁷¹ Catherine Mary Hilbert,⁷² and Paul Avis.⁷³ There has emerged from this literature a litany of expressions: the ironic imagination,

⁶³ Michael Paul Gallagher, “Imagination and Faith,” *The Way* 24 (1984) 122.

⁶⁴ The major works of William F. Lynch include: *Christ and Apollo: The Dimensions of the Literary Imagination* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1960); *Images of Hope: Imagination as Healer of the Hopeless* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1965); *Christ and Prometheus: A New Image of the Secular* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1970); *Images of Faith: An Exploration of the Ironic Imagination* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1973). For a full bibliography and analysis of Lynch’s work, see Gerald J. Bednar, *Faith as Imagination: The Contribution of William F. Lynch, S.J.* (Kansas City: Sheed and Ward, 1996).

⁶⁵ Ray L. Hart, *Unfinished Man and the Imagination: Towards an Ontology and a Rhetoric of Revelation* (Atlanta: Scholars, 1985).

⁶⁶ David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (New York: Crossroad, 1989).

⁶⁷ John McIntyre, *Faith, Theology and Imagination* (Edinburgh: Handsel, 1987).

⁶⁸ Garrett Green, *Imagining God: Theology and the Religious Imagination* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989).

⁶⁹ Sandra M. Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1991).

⁷⁰ David Bryant, *Faith and the Play of Imagination: On the Role of Imagination in Religion* (Macon: Mercer University, 1989).

⁷¹ Michael L. Cook, *Christology as Narrative Quest* (Collegeville: Liturgical, 1997).

⁷² Catherine Mary Hilbert, *Naming Grace: Preaching and the Sacramental Imagination* (New York: Continuum, 1997).

⁷³ Paul Avis, *God and the Creative Imagination: Metaphor, Symbol and Myth in Religion and Theology* (New York: Routledge, 1999).

the parabolic imagination, the dialogic imagination, the analogical imagination, the sacramental imagination, the moral imagination, the scriptural imagination, and the paschal imagination. If revelation, as Dulles and others claim, is best understood as being symbolically mediated,⁷⁴ then God's self-communication through the mediation of symbol finds its point of contact in the human imagination. For Garrett Green, human imagination is the *Anknüpfungspunkt* [point of contact] between symbolically mediated revelation and human reception in faith.⁷⁵

Sensus fidei, as a capacity, has as its primary mode the poietic imagination which weaves together the disconnected threads of a life into a meaningful tapestry where God is now portrayed as the significant redeeming figure. *Sensus fidei*, as the product of that imagining, is the "sense of the faith" that is woven, either consciously or unconsciously. The imaginative work of construing an integrated *sensus fidei* is a making-sense of one's past, present, and future life, in the light of faith and with the eyes of faith. It is a work of discovery and integration that begins with my experienced need for salvation and my experience of God's grace within my concrete situation. As such, the very work of imagination is an expression of one's believing. The faith it expresses is salvific and revelatory because it relates intimately to that person's actual experience and reception of salvation through Jesus Christ in the Spirit. In this way, the imaginative construal of a *sensus fidei* involves the explicit or implicit creation of a concrete catechism and an *existentiell* (or concrete) hierarchy of truths drawn from the official teachings of the Church and the objective hierarchy of truths. This ongoing process is integral to the development in the individual of a specific form of spirituality which is found to be meaningful from the perspective of one's class, race, gender, culture, language, age, personal history, psychological type, and so on. Above all in this way is the gospel inculturated and contextualized.

Within the moral sphere, the imaginative work of *sensus fidei* requires the complementary judgment of conscience.⁷⁶ Conscience is *sensus fidei* functioning in its critical and practical mode. For St. Paul, conscience or

⁷⁴ See Avery Dulles, *Models of Revelation*, 1st ed. (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1983) 131–54; Justin J. Kelly, "Knowing by Heart: The Symbolic Structure of Revelation and Faith," in *Faithful Witness: Foundations of Theology for Today's Church*, ed. Leo J. O'Donovan and T. Howland Sanks (New York: Crossroad, 1989) 63–84.

⁷⁵ Green, *Imagining God* 5.

⁷⁶ Here the work of Paul Ricoeur on imagination and conscience can be helpful as a background theory. Mark I. Wallace writes of the shift in Ricoeur's thought concerning the role of imagination in the reception of revelation. "Without conscience, the voice that summons the self to its responsibilities falls on deaf ears. In Ricoeur's earlier writings the imagination played the role of a sort of *praeparatio evangelica* for the reception of the divine word. While not denying this previous

syneidesis (“knowledge shared with oneself”) is founded on a capacity all human beings possess.⁷⁷ Not all possibilities presented by the imagination for action are necessarily true to the faith. In the conflicts of concrete situations the moral capacity of conscience chooses the wise way in the light of particular circumstances. Conscience, in Ricoeur’s precise sense of “personal conviction in a concrete situation,”⁷⁸ has a close connection with *phronesis*, practical wisdom. *Sensus fidei* is this practical sapiential and critical sense; it is faith knowledge applied in the concrete everyday, bridging theory and praxis, doctrine and life.

But what is the norm for testing the fidelity of an individual’s *sensus fidei* against the faith of the Church and with foundational revelation? What norm informs the judgment of conscience? What practical wisdom? Whose practical wisdom?

The Primary Norm of *Sensus Fidei*

Fundamental to this imaginative construal of a *sensus fidei*, if it is to be *Christian* faith, is the role of Scripture and tradition in fashioning the Christian imagination. Together they witness to the primary norm of *sensus fidei*, Jesus Christ. Although they constitute the primary and secondary witnesses to revelation,⁷⁹ Scripture and tradition nevertheless function within a hermeneutical circle of ecclesial understanding.⁸⁰

emphasis, the focus is now on the subject’s *moral* capacity to select which figures of the imagination best enable the subject’s care and concern for the other. The work of imagination and the testimony of conscience together empower the subject to appropriate the command to take responsibility for the other’s welfare.” See Mark I. Wallace, “Introduction,” in Paul Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative, and Imagination* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995) 1–32, at 29. On the moral imagination, see Marilyn Martone, “Capital Punishment and the Moral Imagination,” *Chicago Studies* 37 (1998) 67–74; Philip S. Keane, *Christian Ethics and Imagination* (New York: Paulist, 1984); Mark Johnson, *Moral Imagination: Implications of Cognitive Science for Ethics* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1993).

⁷⁷ Ricoeur writes: “Conscience is thus the anthropological presupposition with which ‘justification by faith’ would remain an event marked by a radical extrinsicness. In this sense, conscience becomes the organ of the reception of the kerygma, in a perspective that remains profoundly Pauline” (Paul Ricoeur, “The Summoned Subject in the School of the Narratives of the Prophetic Vocation,” in *Figuring the Sacred* 262–75, at 272).

⁷⁸ Paul Ricoeur, David Pellauer and John McCarthy, “Conversation,” in *The Whole and Divided Self*, ed. David E. Aune and J. McCarthy (New York: Crossroad, 1997) 221–43, at 235.

⁷⁹ See Hermann J. Pottmeyer, “Tradition,” in *Dictionary of Fundamental Theology*, ed. René Latourelle and Rino Fisichella (Middlegreen, Slough: St. Pauls, 1994) 1119–26.

⁸⁰ On the circular relationship between Scripture and tradition in their produc-

Tradition is both the process and modes of communication by which the Church transmits what it has received in faith: God's offer of salvific revelation through Christ in the power of the Spirit. "In its doctrine, life and worship, [the Church] perpetuates and transmits to every generation all that it itself is, all that it believes."⁸¹ The diverse media of tradition fashion the Christian imagination of each generation. Through the genres of Scripture, through liturgy with its manifold imaginative forms, through creeds and doctrines, through public prayer and private prayer, through rosary beads and prayer books, through music and poetry, through novels and film, through incense and stained glass windows, through lives of the saints and living heroes in the faith, through paintings and statues, through family life and formal catechesis, through commitment to justice and political engagement, the faith is revealed, handed on and experienced. Scripture plays a special role in that process of faith formation. Among the media and contents of tradition, Scripture is honored as the word of God; as such, it functions as a special criterion for the traditioning process itself.

Within the hermeneutical circle of understanding between Scripture and tradition, the primary norm for all interpretations of the faith and a faithful *sensus fidei* is the person of Jesus Christ. If the ultimate object of *sensus fidei* is the triune God, then the *regula fidei* is Jesus Christ, since it is through Christ that we experience God's outreach to humanity in the power of the Spirit. It is a norm that requires constant reception and re-interpretation throughout history and within diverse contexts.⁸² I wish to focus on only two aspects concerning this norm or *regula*: the role of imagination and the role of narrative, both in Scripture's normative witness to Christ and in the Church's reception of that witness.

Scripture itself is a work of the poetic imagination. And, as Alonso Schökel reminds us, "what was written with imagination, must be read with imagination."⁸³ *Sensus fidei*, as faith in its imaginative and interpretative mode, is the bridge between the world that Scripture imagines ("the world

tion and ongoing reception, and the hermeneutical inadequacy of the axiom *norma normans non normata*, see Boff, *Theology and Praxis* 140: "Scripture appears as a model interpretation, and thus as an *interpreting interpretation*, a *norma normans ut normata*. The hermeneutic circle works from the inside out, in the sense that this hermeneutic paradigm grows richer as such through the interpretations that it permits. Its 'letter,' in its very unchangeability, is in some sense further determined by the significations that it has itself engendered. This is the very meaning of tradition. We see, then, that the 'circle' is inescapable. It reappears at every turn in the hermeneutic process. The concept of scripture as a *norma non normata*, then, must be transcended."

⁸¹ *Dei Verbum* no. 8.

⁸² See Rush, "Determining Catholic Orthodoxy: Monologue or Dialogue?"

⁸³ Luis Alonso Schökel with José María Bravo, *A Manual of Hermeneutics* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998) 170.

of the text”) and the individual’s imagining of real possibilities within “the world in front of the text.”⁸⁴ A dialectical relationship exists between Scripture which forms the imagination of the reader, and the human imagination which gives form to the Scriptural text through the work of re-interpretation. Scripture both forms within the reader what Sandra Schneiders calls a “paschal imagination,” and yet requires engagement of the paschal imagination for the re-figuring of its meaning.⁸⁵ The reader brings to the act of reading the imagination of one who has experienced the paschal mystery in their daily life.

The world that Scripture imagines is a narrative world, stretching from God’s rule over creation at the genesis of human time and stretching into the open future when God will rule over all at the end of human time. This narrative world Jesus called “the reign of God.” Jesus’ configuration of this world is the product of, what John McIntyre calls, his “parabolic imagination.”⁸⁶ His parables, as witnessed to in Scripture, are invitational forms of discourse, invitations to a different way of seeing things. Jesus invites his hearers (as the evangelist invites his readers) to enter into God’s way of seeing by entering into the world configured by his parables. Upon entering that world, they are invited to see things from a different perspective, from God’s perspective. From within that world, they are invited to see themselves as different, by identification with characters in the narrative who live under the reign of God. Upon leaving that “imaginary world” and re-entering the so-called “real world,” they are invited to imagine themselves as being different, as transformed, as changed.⁸⁷ Jesus invites transformation of their imagination. His parables “would have us think the unthinkable, conceive the inconceivable, and imagine the unimaginable, namely, the real possibility of ‘a new heaven and a new earth’.”⁸⁸ Through this process of conversion the reign of God becomes a reality in its recep-

⁸⁴ On the “scriptural imagination” and “the world of the text,” see Luke Timothy Johnson, “Imagining the World Scripture Imagines,” *Modern Theology* 14 (1998) 165–80.

⁸⁵ Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text* 102–8.

⁸⁶ McIntyre, *Faith, Theology and Imagination* 19–39. Further, Ricoeur speaks of the narrative-parable as paradigmatic of the Bible as a whole: “Here we may have, it seems to me, the most complete illustration of the biblical form of imagination, the process of parabolization working in the text and engendering in the reader a similar dynamic of interpretation through thought and action” (Ricoeur, “The Bible and the Imagination” 147).

⁸⁷ On Hans Robert Jauss’s notion of *catharsis* and the reader’s esthetic experience, see Rush, *The Reception of Doctrine* 76–79.

⁸⁸ Richard G. Cote, “Christology and the Paschal Imagination,” in *Who Do You Say That I Am?*, ed. Werner Jeanrond and Christoph Theobald, *Concilium* 1997/1 (New York: Orbis, 1997) 80–88, at 84.

tion. As Paul Ricoeur puts it, “the kingdom of God is not what the parables tell about, but what happens in parables.”⁸⁹

In moving from Scripture to the Christian life, we pass from “the work of imagination in the text” to “the work of imagination about the text,”⁹⁰ from the notion of the Bible as forming the believer’s “paschal imagination” to the complementary notion of the reader’s paschal imagination needing to give form to the biblical text. This bridge is the constructive work of *sensus fidei*.

But the normativity of Scripture for a faithful *sensus fidei* requires care in its application. The world configured by Scripture and the world refigured by the reader might both contain elements which in fact work against a faithful fashioning of the imagination. Particularly in its symbols and metaphors the world imagined by Scripture may perpetuate the very opposite of a world where God reigns. Furthermore, the imagination of the contemporary reader also may be blinded to its own shadows and sinfulness. The reader’s always inchoate paschal imagination must constantly come under the norm of the paschal mystery itself.

It is here that the capacity of *sensus fidei* for discernment emerges as a highly significant element in the individual’s reception of revelation. *Sensus fidei* is that critical capacity that senses intuitively what is of God and what is not of God. As Martin Luther would put it, it seeks to discern what interpretation “brings forth Christ” and what does not.⁹¹ Tillard’s definition quoted previously captures this critical capacity of *sensus fidei*: it not only grasps instinctively what is in harmony with the authentic meaning of the Word of God, but also what deviates from it, what cheats it, the words that kill it, the falsehood of empty gestures, what jars, is out of tune, what is amiss with such and such a decision, with such and such a faith-formulation.⁹²

The second aspect of Scripture’s normativity for faith that concerns us here, alongside the role of imagination in its production and reception, is the narrative nature of confessing the Christian faith. The Christian Gospel has an inherently narrative structure. Certainly narrative is only one form of revelatory discourse to be found in the Bible, alongside prophetic, prescriptive, wisdom and hymnic discourse.⁹³ However, the world that the whole Bible evokes is a narrative of a God who intervenes to reveal and to

⁸⁹ Ricoeur, “The Bible and the Imagination” 165.

⁹⁰ Ibid. 166.

⁹¹ *Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe Deutsche Bibel* (Weimar, 1906) 7.384. See the allusion to Luther’s maxim in International Theological Commission, “On the Interpretation of Dogmas,” *Origins* 20 (May 17, 1990) 10 [Section C, I, 4].

⁹² Tillard, “Church and Apostolic Tradition” 248.

⁹³ See Paul Ricoeur, “Toward a Hermeneutic of the Idea of Revelation,” *Essays on Biblical Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980) 73–118.

save. On recent scholarly attention to this narrative structure of biblical faith, Agustín del Agua writes:

The narrative form of confessing faith throughout the New Testament does not simply follow a generalized trend in religious phenomenology but is a result of the narrative nature of the Christian message. An event is being confessed and communicated. Therefore, Christian faith can be truly understood only by telling a story, just as happens in any individual process of Christian faith: it is the intervention of God in their lives (experienced as foundational) that allow believers to narrate themselves (narrative identity) in the key of salvation.⁹⁴

The story of salvation is precisely that, a story, stretching from the beginning of cosmic time to the open future of the eschaton when God will be all in all. As Michael Root writes: “narrative is not merely ornamental in soteriology but constitutive.”⁹⁵

THE PRIMARY FORM OF *SENSUS FIDEI*

If the norm of a faithful *sensus fidei* is Jesus Christ as witnessed to in Scripture and tradition, then the primary form of a *sensus fidei* is a life lived out in fidelity to Jesus Christ within the community of the Church.⁹⁶ *Sensus fidei fidelis*, in its most profound expression, takes the form of an individual's life.

Already I have spoken of the narrative structure of the faith as witnessed to in Scripture and of the narrative quality of experience, especially in terms of the hermeneutical triad of understanding, interpretation, and ap-

⁹⁴ Agustín del Agua, “The Narrative Identity of Christians according to the New Testament,” in *Creating Identity*, ed. Hermann Häring, Maureen Junker-Kenny and Dietmar Mieth, *Concilium* 2000/2 (London: SCM, 2000) 91–99, at 91. Likewise, Metz writes: “Theology is above all concerned with direct experiences expressed in narrative language. This is clear throughout Scripture, from the beginning, the story of creation, to the end, where a vision of the new heaven and the new earth is revealed. All this is disclosed in narrative. The world created from nothing, man made from the dust, the new kingdom proclaimed by Jesus, himself the new man, resurrection as a passage through death to life, the end as a new beginning, the life of future glory—all these show that reasoning is not the original form of theological expression, which is above all that of narrative.” (Johann Baptist Metz, “A Short Apology of Narrative,” in *Why Narrative? Readings in Narrative Theology*, ed. Stanley Hauerwas and L. G. Jones [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989] 251–62, at 252).

⁹⁵ Michael Root, “The Narrative Structure of Soteriology,” in *Why Narrative?* 263–78, at 263.

⁹⁶ As Jean Tillard has remarked, “*sensus fidei*’s importance comes from its essential link with a Christian life lived in evangelical authenticity, of which it is an expression. This is an aspect too little noticed by theologians who deal with *sensus fidei*. . . . What gives the seal of truth is the evangelical authenticity of life” (Tillard, “Church and Apostolic Tradition” 249).

plication. The implications of employing the category of narrative for understanding a sense of the faith now need to be made more explicit by articulating a particular notion of the human person and of personal identity. What anthropological background theory best complements the poetic imaginative capacity of *sensus fidei* we have been speaking about? Who is this “self” who believes and has a sense of the faith? What anthropological vision of human identity can help ground our theological vision of the identity of a Christian believer? Does a Christian’s sense of self impact on his or her sense of the faith, and vice versa?

Just as the doctrines of the faith are not timeless faith propositions requiring no interpretation,⁹⁷ so too the believing self who makes sense of the faith is not some fixed unchanging substance. I will propose that, if the contents of the faith presuppose a narrative, and if personal identity is narrative in form, then the identity of the Christian is best understood in terms of narrative; and that the personal identity of a Christian and his or her *sensus fidei* are mutually formative.

Among the many interpretative theories of identity, Paul Ricoeur’s hermeneutics of the self is the most useful for our purposes.⁹⁸ In his philosophical writings, Ricoeur plays with the two Latin words *idem* (the same) and *ipse* (self) and distinguishes the “who” that endures through time, and the “who” that changes through time. Rejecting any substantialist notion of “self” and personal identity, he distinguishes *idem* identity (identity of “the same”) and *ipse* identity (identity of “the self”). Across time the self remains constant and yet is always changing. For Ricoeur, only a recounted narrative of a life story can capture this dialectic of sameness and newness. Retrospectively, the self’s life-story is given unity through a narrative in which the self is as once the narrator and a character in the plot. Paradoxically, the element drawing the self forth into newness is the persistent presence of “others,” whether the other be a friend or stranger, or one’s

⁹⁷ See Rush, “Determining Catholic Orthodoxy: Monologue or Dialogue?”

⁹⁸ For comment on the shift to interpretative theories of identity in theology, see the comment of Anne Fortin-Melkevik, “The Identity of the Christian Following Jesus Christ,” in *Who Do You Say That I Am?*, ed. Werner Jeanrond and Christoph Theobald, *Concilium* 1997/1 (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1997) 91–101, at 91–92: “Theologies of identity now touch on all sectors of the theological reflection and raise the question of encounter with the figure of Jesus Christ . . . The human subjects who take up the story of their lives, who re-read the course of their existence in the light of their encounter with Jesus Christ, are thus put at the centre of a number of theologies. In so doing one gives priority to the way which retraces the Bible stories that address the stories of contemporaries . . . The move from a problematic of Christian identity to the identity of the Christian is more than a bit of flirting; the paradigm of pluralism within the community is at stake. That is why this transition from Christian identity to the identity of the Christian is increasingly important in the local churches.”

own self encountered in conscience. Constantly, the self is summoned by otherness, summoned outward and forward through time into the open future.⁹⁹

For Ricoeur, in his more theological writings, the primary literary paradigm of “the summoned subject” is that of the Old Testament prophet responding to the call of God.¹⁰⁰ The dialectic of call and response in the prophetic literature displays a dialogic structure at work in all receptions of the faith, and for our purposes, at work in the construction of a sense of the faith. For Ricoeur, the counterpart in the New Testament of the responding prophet is found in the Pauline notion of conformity to the Christ figure. Paul speaks of identification with Christ, of incorporation into Christ, of a dialectic between the old self and the new self. Baptized Christians are summoned to have “the mind of Christ” (1 Corinthians 2:16). “For to me, living is Christ and dying is gain” (Philippians 1:21). “Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 2:5). “I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death” (Philippians 3:10).

In tracing the history of literary and theological reception of this figure of the prophetic and the christomorphic subject, Ricoeur highlights two paradigms in particular: Augustine’s figure of the “inner teacher” and the notion of conscience. First, Augustine in his work *The Teacher*, written from the horizon of a neo-Platonic notion of illumination, internalizes the role of teacher into a process of “inward learning,” recalling the Johannine assurance “you do not need anyone to teach you . . . his anointing teaches you about all things” (1 John 2:27). Ricoeur’s second figure is that of conscience, “surely the most internalized expressions of the responding self.”¹⁰¹ For the summoned subject, the call of conscience becomes “a call of the self to itself”¹⁰² Here, for the theologian, one arrives at the deepest sense of Ricoeur’s title, *Oneself as Another*: from the perspective of the risk of Christian faith and rejection of the false dichotomy between autonomy and heteronomy, response to the call of conscience is a free risk where the self discovers oneself as Another, Christ.

⁹⁹ See Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1992). For a succinct summary of the main theses of the book, see Paul Ricoeur, “Approaching the Human Person,” *Ethical Perspectives* 6 (1999) 45–54.

¹⁰⁰ Two of Ricoeur’s 1986 Gifford Lectures are not included in *Oneself as Another* because of their specifically theological focus. The eleventh lecture has been published in English as “The Self in the Mirror of the Scriptures,” in *The Whole and Divided Self*, ed. David E. Aune and J. McCarthy (New York: Crossroad, 1997) 201–20. The final twelfth lecture is published as “The Summoned Subject,” in *Figuring the Sacred* 262–75.

¹⁰¹ Ricoeur “The Summoned Subject” 271.

¹⁰² *Ibid.* 273.

The constant refashioning of one's life through the poetic imagination is a taking on of "the same mind that was in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 2:5). It is an imitation of Christ (in Latin, *imitatio Christi*; in Greek, *mimesis Christou*). Once again, the work of Ricoeur can provide a helpful background theory in our discussion of the imaginative role of *sensus fidei* and the interpretation of Scripture. Literary *mimesis* for Ricoeur relates to three worlds: *mimesis I* (the world behind the text), *mimesis II* (the world of the text), and *mimesis III* (the world in front of the text). The work of imagination in each of these worlds he calls prefiguration, configuration and refiguration.¹⁰³ Imitation of Christ (*mimesis Christou*) can also be conceived in terms of these three worlds. Sandra Schneiders in particular has related Ricoeur's work to the prefiguring, configuring and refiguring of Christ taking place in the world behind the scriptural text, in the world of the text and in the world in front of the text.¹⁰⁴

Our particular interest here is the world in front of the text in which the reader refigures Christ within the flow of his or her own life-story. This work of refiguration is the function of *sensus fidei*. Furthermore, the refiguration of Christian identity as a sense of the faith is a *mimesis Christou* in the world. This new imagining of oneself as a Christian in the concrete situations of life is the primary form of one's *sensus fidei*. It is a sense of how the reign of God that Jesus imagined in parable could be refigured and made real in one's everyday world. It is a new imagining of what it means for me to be a disciple of this Jesus. It is a conceiving of my life as a life in Christ, of my life's story as a narrative of emerging Christian identity in a new context. Thus one's "sense of the faith" is determined by "the narrative quality" of Christian experience. Doctrine is always read through the lens of life.

To reimagine the world that Scripture imagines, and to reimagine my self within that world, is to imagine my self as another, as new, as different, as Christ. Christian self-identity is an ongoing project of conversion.¹⁰⁵ It is an imaginative projection of oneself into the *past* and reconstruction of the narrative thread of one's life history up to the *present*. It is situating oneself in relationship to God in a narrative of sin and salvation. It is also an imaginative projection of oneself into a possible new *future* as a "new creation," in Pauline terms. It is imagining "the old self" as past and the new self as a transformed identity, the same yet different. In the tension between experience and expectation, a new space opens out into a different

¹⁰³ See Paul Ricoeur, "Time and Narrative: Threefold *Mimesis*," in *Time and Narrative* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1984) 1.52–87.

¹⁰⁴ Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text*.

¹⁰⁵ For a reinterpretation of the cardinal virtues in terms of a hermeneutical anthropology, see James Keenan, "Virtue and Identity," in *Creating Identity* 69–77.

self. Sameness and difference, continuity and discontinuity mark the narrative journey of the self along the journey of the disciple. The faithful imagining of *sensus fidei* thus functions to preserve continuity with the self's past and it functions to disrupt that continuity by opening up new possibilities in the future.

EIGHT FUNCTIONS OF *SENSUS FIDEI*

I have suggested that *sensus fidei* is both an imaginative capacity to interpret revelation, as well as the particular interpretation of revelation constructed by the individual believer in the Christian community. On the level of *fides qua*, this imaginative activity enables the believing self to discover and make sense of revelation within the narrative of one's life. On the level of *fides quae*, each individual necessarily constructs, consciously or unconsciously, his or her own concrete catechism according to the norm of Jesus Christ as witnessed to in Scripture and tradition.

I now propose a framework that highlights at least eight overlapping dimensions of the imaginative capacity of *sensus fidei*: the personal, the heuristic, the cognitive, the practical, the soteriological, the integrative, the critical, and the ecclesial. These eight dimensions of *sensus fidei* as a capacity will condition and be conditioned, within a hermeneutical circle of understanding, by the individual's particular sense of the faith throughout the life-long journey of their faith development.

Firstly, *sensus fidei* has a *personal* dimension. It is the fruit of one's personal relationship with God, encountered through Christ in the power of the Spirit. This *sensus* is an interior affinity with the God who is reaching out in a movement of self-giving love. Faith is a personal communion of love with God. A sense of this faith is grounded in a personal relationship of love.

Secondly, *sensus fidei* is a *heuristic* sense. It discovers and uncovers. With an imagination formed by ecclesial faith, it perceives a revelatory presence mediated through symbol. Indeed, in its recognition, symbol becomes mediatory only when imagination "sees the Invisible." The ordinary is recognized as extraordinary, the human as divine.

Thirdly, *sensus fidei* has a *cognitive* dimension. From the hermeneutical circle between *fides qua* and *fides quae*, there comes a "knowing" that is grounded in this personal and loving affinity with God as Mystery. Paul could say: "I know the one in whom I have put my trust" (2 Timothy 1:12). Because of the believer's communion with God there exists a "connatural knowledge" of the loved one. This knowledge is often more intuitive, tacit, rather than capable of being clearly articulated in concepts. The narrative of a life tells it best. On this level, symbol, metaphor, and story are the first language of articulation rather than concept. This connatural knowing

(*fides qua*) conditions the believer's understanding, interpretation, and application of the formal teachings of the Church (*fides quae*) which finds its expression in a concrete catechism.

Fourthly, *sensus fidei* is a *practical* sense. Closely related to the cognitive dimension, this aspect highlights the close relationship between knowing and doing/acting. The faithful one sets out to show the truth by doing the good. Through personally knowing the revealing God on an intuitive level and through receiving the Church's proclamation of the Gospel, the believer acquires *phronesis*, practical wisdom, for applying "the faith" within the challenges of a particular context. Knowing the implications of faith for daily life comes intuitively, albeit within the tension between sinfulness and liberation. Often reasons cannot be given for this sense of the faith. Love knows what love must do. In being a practical sense, *sensus fidei* is thus also a moral sense, as conscience brings judgment and decision to bear on consequent action.

Fifthly, *sensus fidei* has a *soteriological* dimension. It is a sense of the faith that emerges out of an experience of salvation in one's own life. Its object is revelatory salvation as real for me, for us, for our world. I find salvation in a life of faithful discipleship to Jesus Christ in the power of the Spirit. My experience of salvation gives meaning to the knowledge of revelation; the knowledge of revelation enables the experience of salvation to be named.

Sixthly, *sensus fidei* is an *integrative* sense. This dimension is at work in all the previous four. This integration bridges past and present, faith and personal identity, doctrine and life, belief and practice. The threads of one's life of sin and salvation are drawn into a meaningful whole, as a story in which God is redeeming and revealing.

Seventhly, *sensus fidei* is a *critical* sense. This salvific and revelatory knowledge gives the capacity for perceptive judgment. The faithful believer develops an intuitive sense of what does not "bring forth Christ." This critical dimension is also present in the engagement of conscience, wherein judgment and choice are made after imagination presents possibilities for action. This suspicious dimension of *sensus fidei* is like the critical eye of the prophet. It is always attentive in the reading of Scripture and tradition to any false interpretation that would not be true to the faith. The faithful Christian knows how easily the Gospel can become the play-thing of ideologies. This critical dimension however also turns self-critical, always placing one's own developing *sensus fidei* under the criterion of the Gospel.

Finally, *sensus fidei* is an *ecclesial* sense. To test my own sense of the faith, I turn to the criterion of other Christian believers' *sensus fidei*. Here the critical dimension above is extended to include an openness on the part of the individual to critique by the wider Christian community (the *sensus fidei fidelium*) and by those entrusted with authoritative oversight of faith-

ful transmission of the gospel (the magisterium). The individual asks: is my sense of the faith that of the Church, “the faith once delivered to all the saints” (Jude 3)? If so, how can my individual sense contribute to an enriching of the *sensus fidelium*?

It is through these eight dimensions of the poetic imagination of the believer that the faith is received in different cultures and contexts down through history and throughout the world Church today.

I have attempted here to articulate some presuppositions for a theology of *sensus fidei fidelis*. Further work would be needed to develop these proposals into a theology of the *sensus fidei* possessed by the whole body of believers in the worldwide Church, and for explaining why this wider *sensus fidei fidelium* must necessarily function as one criterion for judging faithful reception of revelation, alongside the other criteria of Scripture, tradition, magisterium, and theology. In short, this article is only a necessary prolegomenon for justifying the further claim in what Herbert Vorgrimler correctly wrote: “Ordinary believers, when they articulate their faith, do have a real teaching authority, which comes from their dignity as recipients of God’s prime revelation.”¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁶ Vorgrimler, “From *Sensus fidei* to *Consensus Fidelium*” 8. I am grateful to Richard Gaillardetz, Bradford Hinze, Michael Putney, and John Thornhill for their helpful comments on an earlier version of this article.