

REVISITING THE SOURCES: HISTORICAL TREATMENTS
OF THE *SENSUS FIDELIUM* AND THEIR CONTEMPORARY
APPROPRIATION — SELECTED SESSION

Convener: Andrew Salzmann, Benedictine College
Moderator: Daniel Finucane, St. Louis University
Presenters: Andrew Salzmann, Benedictine College
Lawrence King, Catholic University of America
Ryan Marr, Mercy College

This session offered a focused discussion of the *sensus fidei* from the early Church through the Middle Ages to Newman and his reception both at Vatican II and beyond. All the panelists engaged the International Theological Commission's 2014 document "*Sensus Fidei* in the Life of the Church" as a primary interlocutor for a developed definition of *sensus fidei*.

Andrew Salzmann began the session with "The *Sensus Fidei* in Appeals to Augustine and in Augustine." Salzmann highlighted both the ITC's distinction of *sensus fidei fidelis* (the believer's instinct for the truth) from *sensus fidei fidelium* (a communal consensus) and its emphasis on the *sensus fidei*'s active character, which achieves a progressively deeper understanding of the faith. *Lumen Gentium*, the first official account of a *sensus fidei*, invokes Augustine; yet, taken in context, its quotation is more a demonstration of the Book of Wisdom's non-apocryphal status. The ITC's citations of Augustine demonstrate less an active *sensus fidei fidelium* than the authority of tradition, though its citations do suggest his belief in a *sensus fidei fidelis*. Salzmann offered the *De beata vita*—in which Monica resolves the theological problems of Augustine's lettered friends—as the clearest attestation of Augustine's belief in an instinct for Christian truth. Augustine's mature explanation of the "mechanics" of this instinct develops in tandem with his trinitarian theology: Love proceeds from truth, so that infused charity brings the lover an implicit knowledge of the beloved. Salzmann lamented that the ITC restricted Augustine to its historical overview, offering a different account of mechanics of the believer's instinct.

Lawrence King presented "The Infallibility of the Universal Belief of the Faithful: Its Nature and Limits." Noting *Lumen Gentium*'s appeal to the "universal agreement" of the faithful, King pressed for a definition of what constitutes that "universal agreement." The paucity of authorities treating this question allowed King to cover a vast span of the tradition. In the patristic era he found that, though authors speak of settling disputes by appeal to what "all Christians" believe, the very existence of such a dispute belies the fact that "all Christians" were agreed; the fathers must intend "an overwhelming consensus." The medieval Ockham differed, interpreting claims that the "entire Church" will not fall into error reductively: An overwhelming majority may fall, but at least a handful (even just of laity) will not. Trent again reasoned that universal consensus is sufficient to claim a doctrine's dogmatic status, a consensus which Melchior Cano held was not vitiated by the dissent of a few faithful or one or two bishops—this state the nineteenth-century manualists termed "moral unanimity." If the consensus of the faithful is to be "overwhelming," King concluded, it is a valuable resource but of little application to the most controversial issues which divide the Church.

*Selected Session: Revisiting the Sources: Historical Treatments of the Sensus Fidelium
and their Contemporary Appropriation*

Ryan Marr concluded the session with “John Henry Newman on Consulting the Faithful: An Idea in Need of Development?” Newman’s *On Consulting the Faithful*, believing that the faithful had maintained the divinity of Christ when the episcopate fell to Arianism, recommended consulting the faithful to discern the content of apostolic tradition. Newman, who held that a healthy Christian not only thought but also “felt” the faith, held that the Church not only taught the faith through the episcopacy, but “felt” it through the faithful. Once controversial, the idea shaped *Lumen Gentium*’s presentation of the *sensus fidei*. The ITC, following Yves Congar, articulates a more active idea of the *sensus fidei* by speaking of a lay role in doctrine’s reception and transmission; this more active role, however, may suggest tension with the episcopal magisterium. Marr resolves that tension by noting that Newman’s analysis of the laity’s role in the Arian crisis was simplistic; neither bishops nor laity consistently outshone the other in the move towards orthodox consensus. The *sensus fidei* should not be seen as a tool to be wielded in doctrinal strife, but as grounding for a patient and respectful dialogue across the church—whose final conclusion is not fully apparent to its participants.

ANDREW BENJAMIN SALZMANN
Benedictine College
Atchison, Kansas