

GOD/TRINITY—TOPIC SESSION

Topic: *Sensus Fidelium* as Life: Affective and Evolutionary Perspectives  
Convener: Manuel A. Cruz, Belmont University  
Moderator: Nancy Dallavalle, Fairfield University  
Presenters: Karl Hefty, Villanova University  
Paul J. Schutz, Fordham University

Life emerges as the unifying point of interrogation within the God/Trinity session. What do the dynamic structures of life and lived experience reveal about the *sensus fidelium*? The papers focus on complementary aspects of life: the affective and the evolutionary.

In “*Sensus Fidelium: Toward a Phenomenology of Revelation*,” Karl Hefty explores how the affective revelation of life gives form and matter to the *sensus fidelium*. Hefty identifies the *sensus fidei* with an affective sense, a feeling, of divine revelation. It consists of feeling oneself and one’s life within the grace-given share of the divine life, which faith welcomes and the sacramental life of the church reveals. Hefty argues that the *sensus fidelium* is itself the divine life, which God shares with the people of God. The *sensus fidelium* is the very life of God revealing itself in the affective life of the Church. One must shift away from revelation as discursive logos, away from authenticating criteria and discursive principles for discerning the sense of the faithful. The question shifts toward the affective self-revelation of life in human life, in the life of God, and in the life of the Church. How does the affectivity of divine life reveal itself in the life of the faithful, and how does this affective sense of the faithful deepen our understanding of human life within the Life of God?

In “Between Horizons: Evolution, the *Sensus Fidelium*, and the Limits of God-Talk,” Paul Schutz shows how the evolutionary emergence of life offers a productive analogy for thinking about the doctrine of God in light of the *sensus fidelium*. Schutz draws a three-fold evolutionary analogy that reinterprets Tradition, the *sensus fidelium*, and the Church, in the light of what evolution reveals about the nature of living environments, emergent possibilities, and time. He exhibits his evolutionary analogy by way of the doctrine of God, noting that all talk about God depends on the particular environment in which it arises, is time-bound, and is evolving. Schutz reminds us that evolution is a creative process that sustains life and challenges us to engage in theological reflection that inquires as to whether our present understandings of God are able to give and sustain life in the contemporary and emergent environments to which they are bound.

In the discussion that followed, Schutz was asked whether humans should be viewed as the high point of the evolutionary process. Though evolutionary science admits degrees of complexity, and though humans have a highly complex and developed mind, Schutz noted that the evolutionary process does not view humans as the best. To do so is to attribute an anthropocentric value to humans that fails to highlight the fact that they—like the Church—exist within a network of relationships with all that exists. Concerning evolutionary time, Schutz noted that time provides the concrete for his evolutionary analogy. Just as evolution describes the way things are in the biological world, the Church is an entity that stands in the tensive space between the horizons of a reinterpreted past and an eschatological future.

*Topic Session: God/Trinity*

In light of the privilege given to time within the evolutionary analogy, Hefty was asked about the role of history within affective revelation. He responded that the reality of historical time is dependent upon life. The very idea and experience of a past, a present, and a future are contingent upon the affective experience of life, not the other way around. A more accurate account of lived time and lived history would move beyond what the historian can say about it, to include all the invisible and affective elements that make up our lives and shape history as it is really lived by all of us. Hefty also took note that certain post-Vatican II debates have shifted away from the historical development of doctrine, focusing instead on how to understand the relationship between finite and infinite life. Such a shift away from doctrine and toward life commends the direction taken up by both Hefty and Schutz, and suggests that a deeper understanding of the *sensus fidelium* depends on a more profound theological understanding of life and the life of the faithful.

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