

HISTORICAL THEOLOGY (II)—TOPIC SESSION

Topic:	Bearing the <i>Sensus Fidelium</i>
Convener:	Daria Spezzano, Providence College
Moderator:	Rita George-Tvrtković, Benedictine University
Presenter:	Amanda Quantz, University of Saint Mary
Presenter:	Gregory LaNave, Dominican House of Studies
Presenter:	Thomas Ryan, Loyola University New Orleans

This session highlighted historical perspectives on the ways saints, among the lay faithful, as bearers of the *sensus fidelium*, may contribute to shaping the teaching and practice of the Church. In “The Thin Red Line: Francis of Assisi’s Reframing of Fidelity in a Militant Church,” Amanda Quantz drew connections between Francis of Assisi’s insight that the Church can be informed, reformed and united through “street ministry” and Pope Francis’ assertion that the faithful majority play a vital role in the life of the Church. Quantz explored the collaborative relationship between Francis of Assisi and the thirteenth century *magisterium*. She highlighted the trust that was established between Francis of Assisi, Pope Innocent, Pope Honorius, and Cardinal Ugolino, which strengthened the Order and bridged the gap between the hierarchy and the rest of the Church. Noting the difficulty in the twenty-first-century Church to define and distinguish between the terms *sensus fidei* and *sensus fidelium*, Quantz highlighted Newman’s three magisterial resources: laity, theologians, and bishops. Following the insights of *Lumen Gentium* and *Dei Verbum*, she suggested that theologians, many of whom are lay people immersed in parish life and various “street ministries,” can be a valuable resource for bishops who wish to take to heart Pope Francis’ understanding that the faithful majority receive the *sensus fidei* infallibly.

Gregory LaNave’s paper, “Is the Saint as Saint a Theologian for Aquinas?,” opened by noting that, whereas Bonaventure and other medievals did not hesitate to regard St. Francis as a theologian, Aquinas does not say the same of St. Dominic, nor of any other saint. One has the strong impression that the only theologian is the university master. LaNave presented an analysis of question 1 of the *Summa theologiae* and question 1 of book 1 of Aquinas’s *Sentences* commentary, looking at the formal, material, and final causes of theology and coming to conclusions regarding the efficient cause, or the author, of theology. LaNave concluded that all of them point to an expansion of the notion of who is engaged in theology, whether it be the contemplative commenting on Scripture, the Fathers of the Church, or the saint who is specially attuned to the divine mysteries.

Thomas Ryan’s paper, “Medieval History, the *Sensus Fidelium*, and Implications for Today,” examined the Feast of Corpus Christi, initiated by a laywoman and her circle who would not live to see its dramatic growth; only in hindsight was it clear that they were giving expression to the *sensus fidelium*. Involving processions, carnivals, and dramas, the feast would come to include elements of popular religiosity. It reinforced, moreover, a shift toward visual communion and away from physical reception, a shift sometimes criticized for distancing laity from the Eucharist. The Feast of Corpus Christi was examined through the lens of recent scholarly trends. For example, attention to the everyday in history can shed light on the role of laity in this and other ecclesial developments. Our access to *Corpus Christi* depends in part on objects, and scholars of material culture can sharpen our

sense of “hearing” what they have to say. Contemporary studies of the history of the senses remind us that for medievals, sight (and other senses) had a kind of physical impact on viewers. The viewed could impress itself upon and so transform them. It was, in a way, intimate to viewers, even at a distance. Ryan argued that these and other scholarly trends can sharpen our perspective on the *sensus fidelium* in history and its implications for today.

Discussion engaged all three speakers in considerations of the role of materiality in shaping the liturgical *sensus fidelium*, the necessity of the gifts of grace for the theologian, the way in which the saint can provide a theological model, and the important role of history in understanding the *sensus fidelium*, for which a trans-historical view is ultimately required in its full enunciation.

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