

AQUINAS—INTEREST GROUP

Topic:	The <i>Sensus Fidelium</i> in the Thought of Thomas Aquinas
Conveners:	Holly Taylor Coolman, Providence College Michon Matthiesen, University of Mary
Moderator:	David Whidden, Our Lady of the Lake College
Presenters:	Jonathan Kaltenbach, (Ph.D. candidate) Notre Dame Gary Culpepper, Providence College

In his paper, entitled “*“Spiritualis iudicat omnia”*” (1 Cor 2:15) in St. Thomas Aquinas’ *Summa theologiae*,” Jonathan Kaltenbach began by noting what seems to be a problem: the phrase “*sensus fidelium*” does not appear in any of the works of St. Thomas Aquinas. Kaltenbach’s paper argues, however, that Aquinas does approach the idea through various applications of 1 Cor 2:15: “The one who is spiritual judges all things.” The first part of Kaltenbach’s paper charted how Thomas applies the verse to the individual believer, beginning with the very first question of his *Summa theologiae* (I.1.6 ad 3) and culminating in a discussion of the gift of wisdom within his treatment of charity (II-II.45.1c). The second part of the paper, however, revealed how Thomas relates the verse to Christ, Who is preeminently the “spiritual human being” and, therefore, “judges all things” (cf. III.59.4c). The final part of the paper gestured at the ecclesial and sacramental aspects of spiritual judgment that depend upon and flow from Christ Himself in an effort to point to the foundations of the *sensus fidelium* which are latent in Thomas’ work.

In his presentation, “Thomas Aquinas and the *Sensus Fidelium*,” Gary Culpepper inquired into Aquinas’s thought in more immediate connection with contemporary theology. He turned first to the 2014 statement of the International Theological Commission, “*Sensus Fidei* in the Life of the Church,” noting especially its rejection of any strict separation between the teaching Church and the learning Church,” and its insistence that “all the baptized participate in their own proper way in the three offices of Christ as prophet, priest, and king. In particular, it taught that Christ fulfills his prophetic office not only by means of the hierarchy but also via the laity.” He then turned to the work of Ormond Rush in *The Eyes of Faith*, to establish a kind of scholarly baseline for contemporary theological thinking about the Christian life lived as a participation in Christ’s “prophetic office.”

Culpepper’s paper included four related investigations, into (1) the nature of the *sensus fidei*, (2) Trinity and Spirit Christology, (3) sacramental mediation, and (4) application of these ideas in the practical areas of *sensus fidelium*: reception, consensus, and edification. (In the final section, Culpepper, too, focused on a verse from the New Testament writings addressed to the Corinthians, 2 Corinthians 13:10.)

The conversation that followed included the suggestion that Aquinas’ account of the gift of wisdom would play an important role in understanding his position on the *sensus fidelium*. In general, the discussion that followed the two formal presentations left many of those present convinced—in some cases, to their own surprise—that there was much in Aquinas’ thought to support a rich account of the *sensus fidelium*.

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