

MELITA THEOLOGICA
Journal of the Faculty of Theology
University of Malta
65/1 (2015): 61–74

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Sensus Fidei and *Sensus Fidelium* in a Marriage Debate

Introduction

In October 2013 Pope Francis announced the convocation of an Extraordinary Synod of Bishops focused on the theme “Pastoral Challenges to the Family in the Context of Evangelization,” for October 2014, to be continued a year later with an Ordinary Synod on the theme “The Vocation and Mission of the Family in the Church and Contemporary World.” This has inspired numerous reactions and initiatives. Many laypeople are feeling strongly boosted in their hope that, after so many years of waiting, their pertinent questions are now being appreciated and understood.

Pope Francis’ initiative to circulate an extensive questionnaire on family issues to all the Bishops’ Conferences, requesting them to diffuse it in their own dioceses, has indeed surprised many faithful who have been struck by the Pope’s extraordinary gift of opening the Church to the concerns of the “wide global village.”

Despite the relative complexity of its questions, the survey prepared by the Synod secretariat has been greatly appreciated throughout the world by the laity. Throughout the pontificate of Pope Francis, many people from all over the world – men and women, lay and ordained, spouses and celibates, priests and bishops – have all felt encouraged by the Pope’s message and his inspiring initiatives, such as his call for “a poor Church for the poor,” his authentic simplicity, his gestures in liturgies and public appearances, and his pastoral trips. Not least among these initiatives were his first Encyclical *Lumen Fidei* of June 2013, and his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* of November 2014. Pope Francis has indeed opened an authentic path for the whole human family to follow and embrace.

Since 2013 there has been great development in the Church, especially with regards to marriage, in the way one is allowed to reflect, to do research, and to

publish. One may here add that, beginning with the pontificate of Benedict XVI, there has already been an initial openness with regard to broaching of urgent questions, investigating them thoroughly, and analyzing them carefully. This state of affairs has been further developed under the present pontificate. A refreshing honesty has emerged that allows one to confront even difficult topics that are specifically related to marriage, and to discuss them in a language that would not be open to misunderstanding. These interesting developments have been keenly followed at the International Academy for Marital Spirituality (INTAMS), which is directed by the author of this article, and by its Chair for the Study of Marriage and Spirituality at the Catholic University of Leuven, through research activities, seminars, symposia and publications.

Introduction to a Marriage Debate

Men and women today express themselves quite differently than ever in the past. Marriages nowadays exist on the basis of diverse kinds of unions. They fall under varying categories, different ways of experiencing a shared life, and different challenges involved in raising children responsibly. Every marriage union starts with the genuine desire and hope that spousal love is the most beautiful thing one can attain in earthly life. Every couple nourishes high expectations of mutual support and help in their personal development. They are also happy of experiencing companionship, and of sharing each other's joys, problems and sorrows. But what are the tools that can help marriage and family develop these expectations in society and politics? Are not the leaders of society and politics themselves also married people? What are the instruments available to the Church today to assist her in preparing couples for marriage in a changing world? And above all, how can a community of married people help couples and their family attain the fulfilment of at least their basic aspirations?

A personal lifelong journey of maturity is a demanding commitment in which people can experience many unexpected, stunning revelations and difficult obstacles. If we take the example of an elderly couple in their bond of lifelong togetherness, we will discover that in their lifetime they would have encountered strains, disagreements and the need of tolerance of all kinds of undesired weaknesses. These are in fact the same great challenges which confront every kind of couple.

Let me here make an observation about the role of pastors when they are called to speak about marital life and its vocation, and about the do's and don'ts of married couples. Pastors are well conscious that today the theology of marriage is not only a very serious matter, but that couples are flesh-and-blood people who are living concretely together as spouses, and expect to be treated as

such. Couples do not merely want a mirror of high (or low) moral standards to be held up to them. Their concrete life and its specific spirituality yearn for more encouragement, comprehension and hope.

This leads me to an additional question: Should not the preparation for the sacrament of matrimony be approached more by women, in conjunction with pastors? Are not women – with their capabilities, gifts and talents – good agents in this matter, just as much as pastors are? Our faith teaches us that God perfected his creation by means of mutuality, and this should be the way with which we can overcome unbalanced situations. Marital love is a natural reflection of the love of God; but life's experiences include all kind of temptations, fragility and weaknesses!¹ In the complex age in which he lived, Jesus imparted normative guidelines, full of hope, to followers who were searching for the truth. What opportunities do we have within the setting of today's family, to help its members follow in the footsteps of Jesus Christ?

My last introductory question concerns our Christian baptismal vocation. What does this vocation mean in concrete terms, and from the perspective of the Gospel, for a layperson to live as a disciple of Jesus within a family context? Is this vocation not an ecclesiological model that is incarnate in our baptism, eucharist, reconciliation and confirmation, and which should be lived out primarily in a family context? Should not all people – pope, bishops, and laity – till the vineyard of the Lord together, at home, in working places, and within the Church, as long as we are journeying here on earth, in faith, hope and love? How can we experience the Christian spirit better, through a synergy of our different vocations?

Looking Back on the Century that Has Recently Begun

In this century, which has recently started, we are living in a secularization that is unprecedented in the way it is unfolding. The older one gets, the more aware one gets of contemporary challenges. Again and again the question arises: What is happening in our soul in this century when – for example – we are capable to using the skills of many workers and the ingenious intelligence of others to construct the safest high-rise, earthquake-resistant building in Mexico, or the world's tallest skyscraper in Dubai, or the biggest aeroplane in the world, but then we are no longer able to hear the call of God? Another example lies in the manner in which we look down condescendingly from the height of our comfort on the many immigrants – incapable of recognizing that they too have a culture that we

¹ Mk 14:38; Rom 7:14-24.

have become unable to discern. Is our progress in reality a spiritual regression? Perhaps we are too quickly overlooking the fact that our development (which is indubitable) can entail the price of an immeasurable impoverishment of the soul.

One has the impression that the advertisements that are dangled before our eyes, by those who have political, social, and economic responsibility, project a blurred ideal and seek to present us with a materialistic-economic model that would allegedly be the primary reason and the ultimate goal of humanity. Indeed, believers tend to accept this style of life uncritically without realizing what we are doing. The most valuable dream is a justly regulated social order that assures everyone a full measure of earthly prosperity. Similarly, daily news is absorbed without realizing the fact that at least 80% of it is sensational and negative. Is there some self-imposed pressure to turn most of the news-bulletins into chronicles of doom?

The same situation prevails when one considers leisure time. Beaches are so overcrowded that they have barely enough space for true relaxation. Similarly, on the mountains during summertime one comes across crowds of breathless trekking tourists, some wearing tennis shoes, and others equipped with climbing gear, all eager to face some mountaineering challenge. Are these people really aware of the power and beauty of nature around them and capable of enjoy it? In sport ventures such as surfing, kayaking, or skiing, cycling and motor biking, the fundamental criterion has become a question of speed that makes them truly risky. All this is done in the name of the triumph of speed and of stretching the limitations of the body. Is this not comparable to getting drunk on cheap alcohol? Is it not all this comparable to a mass weekend-hysteria of inner emptiness experienced by persons who are unable to be alone? What kind of model are we projecting to our children here? What does all this mean? What have we lost (and want to regain)? Why do we make excessive demands on nature? Has respect for nature perished? Have we relegated the powers of the soul into exile in a diaspora?

“When Humans do not Question, the Holy Spirit Cannot Answer”²

In the *communio* of all the faithful, and especially in the communion of spouses and their families, we need once more a wellspring that can rejuvenate our Christian belief, with the balsam of *love*, with the light of *faith*, and with a

² See Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, trans. Columba Hart and Jane Bishop, Classics of Western Spirituality (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1990), 141.

shining *hope*. Our experience as baptized Christians, including married couples and families, means that we have the right to be adequately introduced to the *sensus fidei* and the *sensus fidelium*, and likewise to the deeper, pastoral meaning of the “domestic Church”. The questions become ever clearer: Why is it that, after the Second Vatican Council, the laity have not been sufficiently instructed by the clergy? This neglect is one of the many contributory factors to an ever widening gap that has developed, for the laity in general and for women in particular, between the hierarchy and the those whose life is detached from the practice of faith.

This leads me to another concern, which is perhaps even more urgent: How can we restore to baptized Christians, and to married couples and their families in particular, responsibility for their life in faith? To avoid any misunderstanding, let me mention briefly that *sensus fidei* is not the same thing as public opinion. “Public opinion is a sociological concept, which applies first of all to political society. Public opinion is therefore essential to the healthy functioning of a democratic life. But the Church is not structured according to the principle of secular political society. The Church receives her constitution from Christ.”³

A Kenotic Church Journeying Together

In reply, I point to numerous role models of committed laypersons across Europe – individual young families, motivated persons at their workplaces, or men or women in parishes and in dioceses. My question is always the same: Why was the sense of faith of the laity not taken more seriously long before? We need a Church that is more merciful and forgiving, following in the footsteps of Jesus Christ, attuned to the everyday needs of the people. It is in the local Church that the fullness of Christianity is realized; in the small Church, with modest resources; in local communities that are in solidarity with the rich and poor alike; a Church that listens to, understands, and responds to the complex realities of relationships today.

Only when this listening and understanding leads to a fresh and authentic voice of the Christian tradition, can the Church win back the trust of the growing number of sceptics. This however requires a real kenosis (Phil 2:7; 1 Cor 1:17, 9:15; Rom 4:14), an institutional self-emptying, in which the Church accompanies people through their real life experiences, where bishops and priests engage in dialogue and understanding with those whom they lead and serve. In

³ International Theological Commission, “*Sensus Fidei*” in *the Life of the Church* (2014), nos. 113, 114, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_20140610_sensus-fidei_en.html.

this light, particular attention needs to be given to the unity of the Church. Our one baptism has always been a mandate to overcome individual and communal differences (1 Cor 12). Yet today we are torn by many divisions, both within Christian communities – clergy and laity, male and female, conservatives and progressives – and in the broader ecumenical communion. Our hope is that the coming Synod in 2015 would constitute a step forward towards a genuine settlement of at least some of these divisions, and towards a real invigoration of Christian reflection on marriage.

A serious *metanoia* and a reconsideration is needed in order to avoid the temptation of paralyzing the gifts and talents of the laity, but instead to encourage the people of God to live out their *kingly*, *priestly*, and *prophetic* vocation. This would greatly help the Church of Christ. In the end, what matters are not our own projects and designs, because that would be similar to constructing a statue of bronze with feet of clay that would break into pieces (Dn 2:32-45). What is needed is a genuine opening to the Spirit so that the vitality of marriage and the family can shine forth, anchored in our one baptism.

In today's secular age and inexorably changing society, the laity experience a gulf whenever ordained ministers present the faith in such a way that the faithful do not feel that they are being accurately addressed with regard to their daily experiences, and the great challenges which they encounter in life. This is leading more and more lay persons to stop identifying with themselves with the Catholic Church. They distance themselves, or they leave the Church to join other communities of faith. Because of this, we urgently need a listening process in the Church. On the other hand, how could baptized Christians in the contemporary world become more conscious of the Catholic conviction, accepting it, and desiring to put it into practice? "In matters of faith the baptized cannot be passive. They have received the Spirit and are endowed as members of the body of the Lord with gifts and charismas ... for the renewal and building up of the Church."⁴

Baptized families have a profound desire to be supported and nourished in their faith in Jesus Christ within their parishes, at least once a week, when they attend church services. But what they too often receive are stones rather than bread, from priests whose liturgical preparation is insufficient for the celebration of Sunday Mass, and who themselves lack spiritual nourishment in preparing their homilies. I apologize for daring to express these deeply felt concerns about today's priests in general. But does not the Gospel of Mark (Mk 1:45) tell us that wherever the Lord Jesus went, he opened people's hearts with his word, and

⁴ Ibid., no. 74.

that people flocked from every place to listen to him? For whatever reason, the spiritual and biblical life of priests is rather weak, and so also is their catechesis. Why is not more attention being paid to all this in priestly training? Why do bishops and priests forget that, at regular intervals during the year, they require time for spiritual revival and a deepening of their knowledge? This would also be beneficial to the faithful who have responsibilities in the world. Many of these faithful are well educated and highly trained lay persons with a longing to hear, to be guided, and to learn more about the revelation of Christ. Instead, pastors often see themselves more as parish managers, and forget to give their own faith sufficient spiritual nourishment. This is another reason why Christians gradually turn into mummies.⁵

The other side of the coin is that there are also many baptized laypeople who have simply forgotten how to evangelize and deepen their own personal faith over the course of time. There are many parents today who do not present their children for baptism or pray with them. These parents have neither the ability nor the desire to accompany their offspring in faith and in the understanding of the sacraments.

All Christians, both those who carry out their ministerial vocation as bishops and priests, and those who carry out their vocation in the world – the so-called laity – are baptized into one and the same Body of Christ. According to the Bible, we are brothers, sisters, and friends, and belong to one family, one communion and one common priesthood. All baptized Christians perform a priestly service and carry out priestly functions, and all share in the same priesthood of Christ. In institutional terms, this means that the priest in his vocation is at the service of the Church as an *ordained minister*, while a layperson contributes according to his or her own *ecclesial vocation* in the world and in the Church. We all need mutual support and accompaniment in our personal development of faith. “All Christian formation consists of entering more deeply into the kerygma.⁶ Evangelization thus also means that all Christians are travelling together, as men and women, in the Church of Jesus Christ. In the Letter to the Romans, the author looks forward to meeting his fellow Christians, “that we may be mutually encouraged by each other’s faith, both yours and mine” (Rom 1:12).

⁵ “Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* of the Holy Father Francis [...] on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today’s World,” (2013), no. 83, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html. See also nos. 145, 147, 149.

⁶ *Ibid.*, no. 165.

The Fruits of the Holy Spirit as *Locus Theologicus*

The question now is: How will participants at the coming Synod on “*The Vocation and Mission of the Family in the Church and the Contemporary World*” take into account relevant passages from the various documents of the Second Vatican Council, as well as the document “*Sensus Fidei in the Life of the Church*,” released in June 2014 by the International Theological Commission. This document states specifically how important it is for the Church as such to experience the *sensus fidelium* and take the laity seriously – by, among others, consulting them – and how greatly beneficial it would be for the Church if we all carefully and continuously were to listen to each other’s experiences and concerns. Humble listening at all levels and proper consultation with all concerned are integral aspects of a healthy and vibrant Church.⁷ This means that because our *baptismal character*, every baptized Christian, with his or her particular vocation in the world, has the privilege of focusing on his or her *priestly, prophetic, and kingly* vocation. In this sense, the family fellowship has a mission to accomplish and a vocation to pursue within the domestic household.⁸ Accordingly, the *sensus fidei* is nothing more than the sensitivity of a Christian believer, a sensitivity that one receives with the gift of the Holy Spirit through baptism. John Henry Newman presented this insight with new vigour. It permitted him to explain how the Holy Spirit maintains the whole Church in truth and to justify developments in the Church’s doctrine.⁹ This insight was renewed in *Lumen Gentium* no. 12.

The Magisterium too “has to be attentive to the *sensus fidelium*, [which is] the living voice of the people of God.”¹⁰ That is why Pope Francis speaks of a listening Magisterium, that equally respects both the affirmations of the Church’s teaching office and its pastoral care, and is nothing other than the Church’s maternal language.¹¹ But where and how can families and spouses practise better their *priestly, prophetic, and kingly* vocation than by cultivating it within the “domestic church”?

⁷ “*Sensus Fidei*” in *The Life of the Church*, nos. 78-80, 123, 126.

⁸ A. Brenninkmeijer-Werhahn and K. Demmer eds., *Close to our Hearts: Personal Reflections on Marriage* (Münster: LIT, 2013), 166.

⁹ “*Sensus Fidei*” in *The Life of the Church*, no. 34.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, no. 74.

¹¹ *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 69; Walter Kasper, *Papst Franziskus: Revolution der Zärtlichkeit und der Liebe; Theologische Wurzeln und pastorale Perspektiven* (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 2015), 54.

Spouses and Family Life as a Concrete Ecclesiology

The “*ecclesiola in ecclesia*, a little church within the larger Church,”¹² is the seedbed for all Christians today. Experience confirms this, and we must rediscover this if we do not want to lose even more believers from our Christian Churches. When we look at the global picture of our contemporary world, we realize that as married fathers and mothers we are more than ever the custodians of Christian values in a secular realm, and guardians of a family culture in which the art of living is taught, practised, and passed on to the next generation. We have not only become witnesses to a global age. More than that, we are living as citizens in a modern secular world that must be understood. This great task is not incumbent only on the Christian Churches as institutions. It concerns just as much every single convinced and baptized Christian. What follows is an identification of four main points where the ecclesiology of the “domestic church” can be put into practice.

Conscience

In view of new problems that have become widespread after the Second Vatican Council, appeals to the conscience have become ever stronger and more frequent. But a “privatization” of conscience, and thereby of morality, is not the right atmosphere in which competence with regard to the conscience can thrive. We read in *Gaudium et Spes* (no. 16): “Deep within his conscience man discovers a law which he has not laid upon himself but which he must obey. Its voice ever calls him to love and to do what is good and to avoid evil.” Instruction about this theme would be very important, and not only in the pastoral care of engaged and married couples and families. But such instruction demands a high degree of competence and empathy in marriage preparation; but we owe it to the married couple and their children, since they require a responsible conscience in their lives. An authentic search for the truth, and especially for religious truth, is just as important today as any instruction in marital morality. It is also important to know what it means to be free and act responsibly, without any coercion or human force. In a pluralistic and secular world, married people today need to be introduced to, and strengthened in the individual “truth” of their specific life, in what Thomas Aquinas calls the *veritas vitae*.

¹² Walter Kasper, *The Gospel of the Family: Address to the Consistory* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2014). Translations are here made directly from the original German text: *Das Evangelium von der Familie* (Freiburg: Herder, 2014).

The Family as “Domestic Church” Paves the Path to God

In chapters three and four, *Lumen Gentium* respectively describes how Christ exercises his prophetic office not only through Church pastors, but also through the laity. It teaches that, “until the full manifestation of his glory,” the Lord fulfils this office “not only by the hierarchy who teach in his name and by his power, but also by the laity.”¹³ If we consider this seriously, we cannot but be astonished that the wonderful fraternal spirit that finds expression here.

The Ecumenical Dimension

Spouses who share in faith the same baptism and belong to different confessions should also draw our reflections. The German language uses the beautiful word *konfessionsverbindend* (“uniting the confessions”) for what English still calls “mixed marriages,” and indeed it would be better to speak of “interchurch marriages.” Accordingly, the term “domestic church” means that all Christians are called to live the *ecclesiola in ecclesia* in “unity of the plurality.” There is still too little reflection on the spiritual possibilities and resources that are latent in interchurch marriages and families. They can act as examples of active family spirituality. They can be an expression of richness rather than being considered as defective. This should be more convincingly and better endorsed. “For you are all ‘one’ in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:28).

Do We Envisage only Perfect Households?

Are we paying sufficient attention to the imperfect, weak, and sinful characters that form part of our families? Is the “domestic church” present only in perfect households, to the exclusion of other households which do not fully correspond to the ideal characteristics of the Church? Some families suffer from estrangements, even between marriage partners. We all know of the pain of separation or divorce, spousal abuse, addiction, and sexual infidelity. Today, another question has arisen: Which type of family qualifies as a “domestic church”? The diversity of contemporary households in Western families necessarily gives rise to such an important question.¹⁴ These are all great challenges to pastoral theology, and to those couples and families who are suffering because of their lot in life. These people are all hoping for and seeking spiritual guidance, repentance, and forgiveness. They want to be healed and to given a chance to start anew.

¹³ “*Sensus Fidei*” in *The Life of the Church*, no. 45.

¹⁴ See Joseph C. Atkinson, “Family as Domestic Church: Developmental Trajectory, Legitimacy, and Problems of Appropriation,” *Theological Studies* 66 (2005): 592-604.

Pastoral Guidance for Ministers and Parents: How Can They become the Salt of the Earth?¹⁵

In this final section, an attempt will be made to answer the question regarding topics which ought to form part of marriage preparation today. In modern secular society, with its ever greater and ever less stoppable universality and pluralism, we must have the courage to ask: “What does the Spirit of God want to say to us today? Where does our Christian identity stand in this ever greater and progressive universality, pluralism, and religious indifference? Is it not rather in the wisdom of the Church, with its practical insights, to help people find a truthful orientation in today’s pluralist world?”

Instead of rejecting our secular world, we should embrace it in order to integrate it into our manifold authentic ways of life. How can the vitality of marriage and the family shine forth in this secular world? In the world that we are now living in, how can our baptism be authentically and truthfully integrated into the realm of our daily lives? And how can the laity, together with the hierarchical Church, recognize better “the signs of the times” and take them into account, instead of being defensive and opposed to modernity? What could the Gospel mean when, in a family context it says that Christians should be *in*, but not *of* the world? What I have in mind here are not superficial spiritual pathways, where elements of a pre-conciliar understanding or of other religious traditions and esotericism are sometimes integrated into the so called post-conciliar Christian tradition. Rather, we should spend more time in pondering how we can strengthen the *school of the family* which is living in a worldly context. How can we transmit an authentic response that the spirituality of marriage is a hospitable platform upon which spouses and their children can meet the secular society head-on with the appreciative values?

Let me now touch on some selective spiritual inputs that can help reinforce our Christian households.

- a) In the first place, there should be a biblical culture. A Catholic, Apostolic Church without a praying and biblical spirit, and without the sense of grace of the sacraments, is like a skeleton without flesh and blood. Saint Paul reminds the early Christians of his apostolic proclamation of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ in order to deepen and renew their faith. “To receive the Gospel requires a response of the whole person ‘with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength’ (Mk 12:31).”¹⁶

¹⁵ Mt 5:13-16.

¹⁶ “*Sensus Fidei*” in *the Life of the Church*, no. 9.

- b) There are also untapped possibilities for parish priests in their family pastoral ministry. Today, there are many more ways how one can live as a Christian than we had been accustomed to before. We are surrounded with different types of non-believers; we also meet people whose atheism causes them pain, as well as others who are spiritual seekers. The question can no longer be evaded: Are the classical pastoral activities of the Church still relevant today? Should we not start thinking seriously about other ways in which we could dialogue, respond to, and support spiritual seekers? Spouses too have to think differently about their future life in faith. Ecclesiology today is a missionary activity exercised in a pastoral manner and a journeying together in dialogue.

Let me explain this by means of two narratives. For a valid and sanctified framework of the *ecclesiola in Ecclesia*, we would need more ministries, men and women, in the parishes to act as a kind of “real estate agents” or “house agents” in promoting the “domestic church” in a serious manner. Awareness of this ought to be one element of today’s family as a school of a quest for meaning and sharing of concrete, practical and truthful examples from our Christian tradition, some of which have long been forgotten. Only this can sustain the Church in the firmness of faith in today’s pluralistic world. This requires courage on the part of the hierarchy and the ordained ministry.

My second example is that we should be more like the Apostle Philip who jumps into the chariot and asks: “Do you understand what you are longing for?”¹⁷ Should we not invest a little bit more time – I mean home-made time, not fast-food time – in being together as couples, or in the family, as well as in the wider family of God, and with our friends? We should reflect a bit more about people’s quest for values and their concerns about meaning, especially today with so many political, social and cultural challenges. The Beatitudes in Gospel of Matthew 5:1-12 are eloquent paradigms of an upside-down thinking vis-à-vis society. We could discuss about how we should deal with authority in the family and in the wider society, or about our relations with the poor, the meek, the old and the sick. How should we react with the given resources of our world? As an alternative, Jesus gives us an awareness of the meaning of the Kingdom of Heaven. He shows us what it means to inherit the earth, to be comforted, to be upright, to be merciful, and to bless rather than to persecute. He shows us how we should face evil and falsehood.

¹⁷ Acts 8:22-27.

Conclusion

If we assume that the light of faith presupposes the sense of faith, as we read in Jn 8:12 – “I am the light of the world. The one who follows me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the light of life” – then there is nothing more beautiful than to know that we are covered with the aura of Jesus, that is to say, that we share in the divine insight. This light that we carry with us should also be better shared out with others. This trust in the salvific event of revelation, in which Jesus Christ has communicated himself, means that we can reply with an inner certainty thanks to the baptism and confirmation that we have received as members of the Christian community of faith by the Holy Spirit. We must restore this trust to the baptized laity in their *ecclesiola in Ecclesia*.

The “sense of the faith,” the *sensus fidei* of the faithful, is a key concept of theology. The *consensus fidei* and *fidelium* are understood as the consensus of the faithful with regard to particular truths of faith. Wherever this consensus occurred in the past, it gave rise to Church “tradition.” This “sense of the faith” has exercised an important role throughout every period of Church history.

The Church Fathers have long dwelled on the issue of *consensus fidei*. But what does it mean for us today? The “sense of the faith” could find expression in such things as the participation by laity in Councils and in the election of bishops. Augustine already spoke of the “internal Magisterium” of Christ. It was in fact taken for granted in the early Church that the faithful played a role in the appointment of bishops. As Pope Leo the Great (d. 461) said: “Whoever is to preside over all [as bishop] ought also to be elected by all.”

My fourth remark is the relationship between theology, hierarchy, and all the faithful. The *consensus fidei* depends on dialogue. In this light of this, we ought to strive within the Church to establish a theological legitimatization of the principle of dialogue and secure for it a place in canon law.¹⁸

My fifth and final point refers to our faith. One who believes is able to recognize the truth of God (cf. Phil 3:10), because it entails responsibility, and especially charity and service (*diakonia*). Every well-meant and skilful work in which one makes an investment ought first and foremost to be integrated and articulated in our Christian life of prayer. Indeed, disciples will be recognized ‘by their fruits’ (Mt 7:20).¹⁹

¹⁸ See Wolfgang Beinert, “Der Glaubenssinn der Gläubigen in Theologie und Dogmengeschichte: Ein Überblick,” in *Der Glaubenssinn des Gottevolkes: Konkurrent oder Partner des Lebramts?*, ed. Dietrich Wiederkehr, *Quaestiones Disputatae*, no. 151 (Freiburg: Herder, 1994), 118-122.

¹⁹ “*Sensus Fidei*” in *the Life of the Church*, no. 12.i,iii,vi.

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God.”²⁰ Human beings became genuine children of God through the bestowal of the Word on them. Our own age no longer makes it easy for us to recognize in our hearts that creation is a spiritual phenomenon, and that its meaning and its goal must also be spiritual. In our society, the Christian family with its offspring is a school, and is thus predestined to sanctify the desecrated world, at least to some extent, and to bear witness both to the world and to the family itself.

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²⁰ John 1:1.