

ASIAN  
HORIZONS  
Vol. 12, No. 3, September 2018  
Pages: 371-374

## *Editorial*

### ***Sensus Fidei, Sesus Fidelium and the Magisterium***

The whole body of the faithful who have an anointing that comes from the holy one (cf. 1 Jn.2:20 and 27) cannot err in matters of belief. This characteristic is shown in the supernatural appreciation of the faith (*sensus fidei*) of the whole people, when, “from the bishops to the last of the faithful” they manifest a universal consent in matters of faith and morals (Vatican II, LG, 12).

The Second Vatican Council affirmed that the body of the faithful as a whole, as they are anointed by the Holy Spirit, have a supernatural sense of faith (*sensus fidei*) which has an unerring quality, when there is a universal agreement among them in matters of ‘faith and morals.’ This sense of faith of the community is discerned and articulated by the official teaching authority of the Church whenever it is called for (LG, 12, DV, 10).

Today more than fifty years after the Council when we talk about a Participatory Church and People’s Churches, several legitimate questions arise: Which body is the *magisterium*? Is it exclusively the body of Bishops? Or could it be a representative body consisting of bishops, clergy and members of the laity both men and women? What is the role and function of the teaching authority in the Church? Is it a function or is it a role? In our situation of divided Churches, which is the authoritative teaching body? What are the place, role and value of a universal agreement and their ‘unerring quality’ today in a post-modern and ‘post-truth’ age? How can we live in a world with provisional faith statements, but always searching for the meanings of the Word of God for us today? Revelation, Deposit of Faith, Apostolic faith, interpretation of faith-statements, diversity of faith-statements, role of theologians as ‘avant-garde,’ role of local Churches/communities, etc. need to be further explored.

Discussions on *sensus fidei*, *sensus fidelium* and the magisterium have been lively especially since the Council. The document published by the International Theological Commission in 2014, “*Sensus Fidei in the Life of the Church*,”<sup>1</sup> has also significantly contributed to this discussion.

In this issue of *Asian Horizons*, we do not propose ready-made formulations and answers to all the questions raised above. Nor do we intend to explore into all these areas in details. The papers in this issue discuss some of the pertinent questions on *sensus fidei*, *sensus fidelium*, and the magisterium, especially in light of the mission of the Church today.

Kuncheria Pathil examines the role of *sensus fidei* of the entire believing Christian community and how it forms the basis for the official teaching of the Church. According to him, this depends on the notions of revelation and faith and the ecclesial models – for example, pyramidal-hierarchical model or communion model – we have. Pathil emphasises that Christian revelation and faith is in continuous progress growing towards the fullness of the truth. This is a spiritual movement, and the entire people of God and its *sensus fidei* led by the Holy Spirit is the basis and controlling factor in this movement. He also considers the question whether the laity has a teaching authority in the Church and answers in the affirmative, and asserts that, “the teaching function of the laity in matters of faith and morals and their role in the decision making bodies of the Churches remains a very serious and important question.” Gerard Mannion points out that Pope Francis’ call for a more participatory Church requires a sea-change in ecclesial culture and, especially a recognition that the laity can exercise teaching authority in the Church. He argues that a clearer understanding of the meaning of magisterium is essential for a constructive evaluation, and concludes that “magisterium primarily refers to the function, the activity of teaching with authority and not to those who carry such a function or activity.” Mannion underscores that participation, co-responsibility and ecclesial equality were part of the Church’s history.

Inocent-Mária Vladimír Szaniszló discusses certain questions concerning the cooperation between the theologian and the Magisterium of the Church. He undertakes this discussion with the

---

<sup>1</sup>International Theological Commission, “*Sensus Fidei in the Life of the Church*,” (2014), [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti\\_documents/rc\\_cti\\_20140610\\_sensus-fidei\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_20140610_sensus-fidei_en.html)

help of *Donum veritatis*, and with special reference to moral theologians. He argues that the theologian has to cooperate with the Magisterium of the Church. He holds that the magisterium and the theologian have to find ways of mutual collaboration. Jean-Marie Hyacinthe Quenum attempts to relate the sound transmission of Christian revelation to people of Africa rooted in their ways of receiving the authoritative words of their beloved ancestors. According to him, the Sound Transmission of Christian Revelation in African Context is an African Christian theology of interpretation of Revelation and Scripture for mature believers in Sub-Saharan Africa reclaiming the communal as the basic dimension of human life.

Stefan Voges takes up one of the pertinent questions, namely, synodality. He shows that the Joint Synod of the Dioceses in the Federal Republic of Germany which took place from 1971 to 1975, as a response to the Second Vatican Council and to the democratisation movement of 1968, can be considered a model. Giving a brief history of that Synod he explains how a synod can be representative of the people of God, and how a synodal decision-making process be designed so that it respects the real competence of the people of God and the responsibility of the bishops. Quoting extensively from Pope Francis, Voges argues that synodality should become the new model of the Church today. He emphasises that synodality is not an end in itself but a concept of the Church to fulfil better its mission. Joseph Xavier holds that *sensus fidei*, the spiritual instinct that all faithful possess in virtue of their faith, is also a criterion for deciding whether a doctrine belongs to the living faith of the Church. He examines the concept of *sensus fidei* in the teachings of the Second Vatican Council and how the Council has affirmed it as the gift of the Holy Spirit to all believers. Following this, he discusses the concept of *sensus fidei* in the teachings of Pope Francis. Joseph Xavier points out that the Pope's concept of *sensus fidei* is influenced by "the theology of the people." Finally, he analyses the relevance of these for the mission of Church today. He underscores that one of the great challenges facing the Church today is to foster in all the faithful a sense of personal responsibility for the Church's mission.

Making use of the teaching of Vatican II on *sensus fidei* as his point of departure, Georg Kirchberger highlights the discussion in the Catholic Church on the ordination of women as an example to show that papal magisterium in the Catholic Church still often overlooks *sensus fidei*. He analyses the arguments against and in favour of the ordination of women. He opines that, "What determines this is not a long-standing tradition, but rather an enquiry into whether that

tradition promotes the salvation of humanity in the present era.” However, Kirchberger underlines that the Papal magisterium and *sensus fidei* should not be put in opposition. Both the hierarchy and the laity have *sensus fidei*, each in its own way searching for the truth, and they should listen to each other.

There are two articles on other topics. Christian Weisner makes a critical assessment of Pope Francis’ five years as pope, and argues that in spite of oppositions, Pope Francis has brought a change of mood into the Church. He emphasises that as witnesses and “messengers” of the inspiring Second Vatican Council it is our task to keep the tradition of plurality and openness within the Roman Catholic Church alive, and that the Church has an important mission to fulfil in today’s world. Paulachan Kochappilly offers an ecological reading of the Liturgical prayer of the Qurbana of the Syro-Malabar Church in order to illustrate the priestly ministry of humans on the earth of the Lord. In the liturgical celebration, the author traces the dynamics of a transmission of values in order to initiate a transformation from within.

**Shaji George Kochuthara**

Editor-in-Chief