

Knowledge of the Heart: Notes on the Definition of the *Sensus Fidei* in the Personal Life of the Believer

Beáta Tóth 

Abstract

The *sensus fidei* is a crucial concept which has assumed growing importance during recent years of theological enquiry, however, it is not so easily defined. This article examines a section of the document. *Sensus Fidei* in the Life of the Church. (ITC, 2014, Chapter 2, no. 48-65) and explores the underlying anthropological-epistemological assumptions which seem to be inherently shaping the idea of the *sensus fidei fidelis* (the sense of faith of the individual believer). What is the site of such a sense of faith in the personal life of the believer? Is there an adequate theological anthropological framework for imagining the operation of this special ‘faculty’? After commenting on the various definitions of the concept, I focus on the four classical theological key elements the document draws on in articulating a modern account: the Thomistic understanding of faith, virtue, connaturality and instinct. The third section of the article highlights inherent tensions between the traditional Thomistic scheme and a post-Enlightenment, anti-rationalist agenda which call for a more systematic elaboration of an adequate current anthropology of the human person.

Keywords

Sensus Fidei, Thomas Aquinas, connaturality, Francisco Marín-Sola, affective way

In search of a definition

That the *sensus fidei* (the ‘sense of the faith’) is not an easily definable concept is a fact revealed by the variety of interpretive approaches adopted by authors of dictionary entries. What one finds when comparing some of these is that certain key terms are taken from the theological tradition and are combined and interpreted in distinctive ways. Herbert Vorgrimler, for example, defines the *sensus fidei* as a mode

of knowledge which stems from faith and is directed to the essentials of faith in the minds of believers, each of whom receives illumination from the grace-giving activity of the Holy Spirit.¹ Gilbert Narcisse describes it as a capacity to apprehend the truths of faith and to discern what contradicts orthodoxy. Such a capacity is a gift or charism given by the Holy Spirit to every member of the Church.² What one gathers from Narcisse's short historical overview of the concept is the remarkable fact that its development is not linear. Rather, a cluster of related ideas point in the same direction without completely corresponding to our present-day understanding of the term. An emphasis on the concept's communal, objective dimension dominates until the nineteenth century (the *sensus fidei* is concerned with what the Church as a community unanimously believes, and the subjective process of the interiorisation of such common faith by the individual believer comes into more systematic focus towards the nineteenth century). In Narcisse's understanding of the Vatican II document *Lumen Gentium* (12), the *sensus fidei* is a supernatural 'sentiment' [*un 'sentiment' surnaturel*] aroused by the Holy Spirit in members of the People of God.

Wolfgang Beinert's dictionary of Catholic doctrine has no entry on the *sensus fidei* as such, but it discusses the *sensus fidelium* (the 'sense of the faith' in its communal aspect) instead,³ defining it as the charism of an inner connaturality with the object of faith, shared by all members of the Church and expressed in a certain consensus and identity of faith. Beinert also sets up a subtle hierarchy of related notions: the *instinctus fidei* (the 'instinct of faith'), the *sensus fidei* (which he takes to mean the faith of the individual believer), the *sensus fidelium*, and the *consensus fidelium*. For him, the *sensus fidelium* is an intermediate term which comes after the *instinctus fidei* (a kind of unarticulated pre-conscious faith) and the *sensus fidei* (faith as acquired by the individual believer), and it precedes the *consensus fidelium* (the collective and unanimous expression of faith). As one may infer from these subtle distinctions, *sensus fidelium* in Beinert's scheme refers to the shared experience of Jesus Christ's grace of faith in the Church, the community of believing individuals. In other words, it is somehow the interiorised faith of individuals forming a spontaneous harmony in a corporate manner. The *consensus fidelium* is in turn the final consciously articulated outcome of such a harmonising process.

¹ 'Glaubenssinn', in Herbert Vorgrimler, *Neues Theologisches Wörterbuch* (Freiburg/Basel/Wien: Herder, 2000), p. 238.

² Gilbert Narcisse, 'Sensus Fidei', in Jean-Yves Lacoste, ed., *Dictionnaire critique de théologie* (Paris: PUF/Quadrige, 2002), pp. 1103–1104.

³ Wolfgang Beinert, 'Sensus Fidelium', in Wolfgang Beinert and Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, eds., *Handbook of Catholic Theology* (New York: Crossroad, 1995), pp. 655–57. For a more recent edition of this entry see Christoph Boettigheimer, 'Glaubenssinn der Gläubigen', in Wolfgang Beinert and Bertram Stubenrauch, eds., *Neues Lexikon der katholischen Dogmatik* (Freiburg im Bressgau, Herder, 2012), pp. 272–74.

Obviously, the *sensus fidei* is a multi-faceted notion offering itself for a wide array of interpretations and resisting easy synthesis.⁴ No wonder, then, that the authors of the much-awaited sustained treatment ‘*Sensus Fidei* in the Life of the Church’ (issued by the International Theological Commission, 2014) were faced with the difficult job of having to synchronise various approaches and fill in lacunae left by earlier accounts of this highly important and yet not easily tractable question.⁵

In what follows, I shall restrict the discussion to a particular limited issue (which, however, as we shall see bears wider significance) and focus on a shorter section of the document, namely, the part treating the *sensus fidei fidelis* in the personal life of the believer (Chapter 2, no. 48–65). My aim will be to explore some of the underlying anthropological assumptions which inherently shape the definition of this complex concept.

The document itself makes explicit the specific procedure it follows, namely, that it ‘utilises, in particular, the framework and categories offered by classical theology’ (SF 48). And I may add that what the text actually does is to reconfigure mainly Thomistic theological concepts in order to make them meet the challenges of current thought on the issue of the sense of faith in the individual person. Is such a procedure successful? Do earlier categories furnish a helpful foundation for a modern reinterpretation and further development? And, more importantly, does the underlying Thomistic anthropological framework fit in seamlessly with questions raised by a later, post-Enlightenment, anthropological perspective? Furthermore, can a post-Enlightenment anti-rationalist account of the human person serve as a good basis for current reflection on the nature of the ‘*sensus*’ of the faith in the individual believer? In order to seek answers to these questions, let us turn now to the text of the document first.

Thomistic elements

The aim of Chapter Two of the *Sensus Fidei* document is twofold. On the one hand, it intends to give a definition of the *sensus fidei fidelis*; on the other hand, it outlines a framework for situating such *sensus* in the human person. It admittedly does not give an exhaustive treatment

⁴ On the various meanings the word ‘*sensus*’ may have, and on the eightfold dimensions of the *sensus fidei* as it functions in the individual believer, see Ormond Rush’s seminal essay ‘*Sensus Fidei*: Faith “Making Sense” of Revelation’, *Theological Studies* 62 (2001), pp. 231–61.

⁵ International Theological Commission, *Sensus Fidei* in the Life of the Church, 2014, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_20140610_sensus-fidei_en.html (accessed: 01.06.2022.). Hereinafter: SF.

of the issue, but rather indicates a few salient points for orientation. Nonetheless, the text is a dense and intricate reflection which employs classical Thomistic terms as building blocks for a modern articulation of the question. Let us survey briefly what I take to be the four key elements of the discussion: faith, virtue, connaturality, and instinct.

First, the document situates the issue in the context of a theology of faith, where faith is understood in classical terms as ‘the adherence of the intellect through love, to revealed truth’ (SF 48). This way of conceptualising faith is claimed by the text ‘still today to clarify the understanding of the *sensus fidei fidelis*’ (SF 48), which is then presented as intrinsically linked to faith by ‘flowing from’, and being, a ‘property of,’ faith (SF 49). Next, faith is characterised as operating in the human person in the manner of a (theological) virtue: a gratuitous gift of the Holy Spirit which infuses the believer with an interior and stable disposition (a *habitus*), a kind of ‘second nature’, whereby one is able to actualise one’s natural inner dynamisms and to construe one’s true human self in a loving relationship with God (SF 51). What the virtue of faith specifically does is to enable one ‘to adhere without reserve to the whole truth revealed by God’ (SF 56). Such adherence is more than the mere acceptance of revealed truths; it is at the same time loving participation ‘in the knowledge God has of himself and of all things’ (SF 53).

Third, at the point of describing the working mechanisms of the supernatural gift of the virtue of faith with regards to its object, the document introduces the idea of connaturality, a complex notion in Aquinas’s theology, which Aquinas draws on in various contexts and in analogous senses without giving it a systematic treatment or reflecting on it in a direct manner.⁶ As recent commentators on the term have

⁶ For a recent philosophical approach, see, for example, R. J. Snell, ‘Connaturality in Aquinas: The Ground of Wisdom’, *Quodlibet* 5:4 (October 2003), pp. 1–7. As Snell explains, connaturality is a clue in Aquinas’s theology for the understanding of wisdom, which is either attained by the a posteriori working of the intellect from experience concerning ultimate causes, or through a connaturality with the object of judgment. Wisdom attained through connaturality has the characteristics of habitual action which is able to function without the deliberation and inquiry of reason. Connaturality is at the same time a gift of grace and as such, is receptive. It is also a result of charity rooted in the will and not the intellect. Snell suggests that with regard to God, it can be characterised as ‘sympathy for the Divine’. For an insightful (moral) theological treatment see Thomas Ryan, ‘Revisiting Affective Knowledge and Connaturality in Aquinas’, *Theological Studies* 66 (2005), pp. 49–68. Ryan notes that in Aquinas’s usage *connaturalitas* is employed in the same analogous manner as the concept of knowledge and that the common element in the various usages is the idea that the object and the knowing subject are ‘naturally fitted together’. Such fittingness or attunement is seen by Aquinas as manifesting itself in several fields of human existence, and is especially important for the operation of the virtues. When God becomes the object of virtues, their mode of operation displays the highest level of connaturality by coming under the influence of grace. As Snell points out, Aquinas describes such an influence as an ‘instinct, a “taste” for the things of God that draws one to perceive, choose and respond in a manner that is “second nature”, namely, as if it is natural and normal for us to know, feel, love, and act as God does.

noted, one can only gather from indirect clues and inferences what Aquinas's implicit understanding of *connaturalitas* is (and also related concepts, such as *convenientia* and *consonantia*).⁷

Why, then, do authors of the document resort to a term which does not lend itself to easily graspable interpretation, especially in a concise text designed for a non-specialist audience? On the one hand, their aim must be to demonstrate, with the help of this traditional idea, the possibility and nature of a mode of knowledge that differs from the one acquired through conceptual reasoning. On the other hand, they may want to find a proper model for explaining the way the virtue of faith operates in the individual. In both cases, the idea of connaturality is meant to lend theoretical support to the definition of the *sensus fidei fidelium* as 'a sort of spiritual instinct that enables the believer to judge spontaneously whether a particular teaching or practice is or is not in conformity with the Gospel, and with apostolic faith' (SF 50). In other words, according to the document, the *sensus fidei fidelium* is the specific instinct developed by the virtue of faith in the believing person, which presupposes the existence of a special mode of spontaneous, non-reflective knowledge as opposed to knowledge attained by way of conceptualisation and reasoning. This is what the text names 'knowledge by empathy' or 'knowledge of the heart', and an antithesis between two types of knowledge (one conceptual, reflective, objective, another instinctive, spontaneous, subjective) can be detected as running throughout the entire chapter, which in the footnotes makes ample references to a variety of Aquinas's works in support of its claims.⁸

However, on consulting more systematic accounts of Aquinas's use of the ideas of connaturality and instinct, one has the impression that the appeal to these concepts in the *Sensus Fidei* document is as much misleading as illuminating, given the fact that they get willy-nilly separated from their corresponding metaphysical and anthropological assumptions. While it is true that Aquinas outlines the contours of a mode of knowledge (practical wisdom by connaturality) which is non-reflective and able to function without the direct deliberation or inquiry of reason,⁹ nevertheless his entire anthropological system hierarchically keeps under the guidance of the intellect every operation of the human faculties, without ever positing an antithetical relationship be-

For Aquinas, this is appropriately described as wisdom, an immediate knowing that comes from loving'. (p. 60.)

⁷ See Thomas Ryan, 'Revisiting Affective Knowledge and Connaturality in Aquinas', p. 58.; see also R. J. Snell, 'Connaturality in Aquinas: The Ground of Wisdom', p. 2.

⁸ *Summa Theologiae*, IIa-IIae, q.1; q.2; q.9; q.45; *The Commentary on the Sentences of Peter Lombard*, III, d.23; d.25; *Commentary on the Gospel of John* (c. 14, lect.4); *Disputed Questions on Truth*, q.14.

⁹ Aquinas, *ST* q. 45. a. 2.

tween reflective knowledge and practical knowledge, intellect and sensibility, or the head and the heart.¹⁰ This becomes clear also from an analysis of Aquinas's understanding of 'knowledge by connaturality', where, according to Thomas Ryan, three distinct levels of operation can be distinguished (but never separated), all of which presuppose a teleological metaphysical system (based on the presumption of a general inclination towards the good), and, I may add, a hierarchical anthropology.¹¹ Ryan's explanation of the three levels is particularly useful for grasping the wider context of Thomistic ideas in the *Sensus Fidei* document.

As Ryan suggests, connaturality means a certain fittingness or attunement between the object and oneself at every level of human knowledge and action, a notion which Aquinas uses analogously and improves upon with time. At the most basic level of affectivity it characterises the complex interaction of the intellect and the will in the attraction that the good exerts upon the embodied human person, for whom it is connatural to be guided to the good. This first level of connaturality is conditioned by a specific teleological metaphysical scheme. The second level is displayed in the operation of the virtues, where orientation to what is good does not simply come from the general metaphysical order of being, but is the result of an acquired 'second nature', the *habitus* of virtue which, by way of connatural orientation, attunes one to habitually doing the good. At this second level, too, intellect and will closely cooperate and interpenetrate one another, although the intellect has the leading role.

The third level of connaturality is the most important for our inquiry. It happens when the horizon changes and the object of the virtues becomes God under the influence of divine grace. This shift also modifies the natural interaction between the intellect and the will because under the impact of grace, and by entering into a personal relationship with the Triune God, both faculties are prompted to exceed their natural boundaries. As Ryan explains:

[t]he graced person is enabled to operate in a suprarational mode, governed by divine instinct rather than the calculative mode of reason. [...] It is described as an instinct, a "taste" for the things of God that draws one to perceive, choose, and respond in a manner that is 'second nature,' namely, as if it is natural and normal for us to know, feel, love, and act as God does. For Aquinas, this is appropriately described as wisdom, an immediate knowing that comes from loving.¹²

¹⁰ See, for example, the main thrust of the argument in Nicholas E. Lombardo, *The Logic of Desire: Aquinas on Emotion* (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 2011).

¹¹ Thomas Ryan, 'Revisiting Affective Knowledge and Connaturality in Aquinas', esp. pp. 54–62.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 60.

As we can see, only at this third level of suprarational operation, in the existential encounter with God, is an instinctive mode of knowledge contrasted against the calculative mode of reason, when the speculative intellect is no longer able to hold non-reflective knowledge under its sway. Otherwise, there is always an interaction posited between knowledge by mode of conceptual reflection, and spontaneous, pre-reflective knowledge in Aquinas's framework. In fact, Aquinas takes great pains to show that the habitual instinctive knowledge whereby a virtue operates is always somehow connected to the operation of reason, even if only indirectly. What happens in the document, in my view, is that such a threefold distinction of connaturality gets blurred, and as a consequence, the third type of supernatural and supra-rational (but never anti-rational) connaturality is somehow naturalised. At the same time, the two modes of knowledge are set over against one another in a symmetrical manner.

And this leads us to the fourth key concept in the document: the idea of spiritual instinct, on which the definition of the *sensus fidei fidelium* hinges. By discussing it as the last of the four central key concepts, I am deliberately inverting the original order of discussion in the text where the idea of instinct is introduced first. By this inversion, I hope to reveal more visibly the inner logic of the account. Here again, one registers an equivocation in the document between two differing interpretations concerning the nature of an instinct. While on the surface tribute is paid to the Thomistic scheme, at a deeper level a more modern (and scientifically informed) understanding is embraced, one that likens spiritual instinct to 'a natural, immediate and spontaneous reaction' (SF 54).

In contrast to the modern sense of the term, *instinctus* is not primarily used to denote a natural and spontaneous sub-rational response in Aquinas. Rather, it is a pivotal element in his inquiry into the workings of divine grace, where it is meant to describe the way supernatural grace influences and attracts human freedom into cooperative action with the Triune God.¹³ Aquinas's idea of instinct is determined by his exegesis of the Johannine saying '[n]o one can come to me unless he is drawn by the Father who sent me' (John 6:44), and is combined with his specific teleological metaphysical system in which beings are seen to be directed towards and attracted by the good.¹⁴ In Aquinas's explanation of the Johannine passage, '[t]he Father draws men to the Son by the instinct of the divine operation interiorly moving the heart of a person to believe'.¹⁵ The issue comes to the fore in the context

¹³ See T. C. O'Brien, *Summa Theologiae*, vol. 31: Faith (2a 2ae. 1–7), (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), pp. 98–99, note 1.

¹⁴ Thomas Ryan, 'Revisiting Affective Knowledge and Connaturality in Aquinas', pp. 60–61, esp. note 46.

¹⁵ Thomas Aquinas, *In Ioann.* 6, lect. 5. Quoted by T. C. O'Brien, *Summa Theologiae*, vol. 31, 99, note 1.

of the theology of faith in the form of the question of how God can move the human will by a divine instinct toward that which should be believed (the question of the initial act of faith), and in the discussion of human action under the influence of the gifts of the Holy Spirit.¹⁶ Essentially, Aquinas's framework puts the emphasis on divine active causality rather than human response or perceptive ability: it is meant to describe supra-rational action rather than sub-rational reaction.

Tensions

So where does this brief textual and conceptual analysis leave one? Are the four Thomistic key concepts (faith, virtue, connaturality, and instinct) illuminative for a renewed and systematic understanding of the sense of the faith and its *Sitz im Leben* with regard to the individual believer and Christian experience? Understandably, while certain elements of the Thomistic framework seem to be instructive, separated from an overall system of Aristotelian-Scholastic metaphysics and a corresponding anthropological vision prove unable to ground seamlessly a modern theology of the sense of the faith. Even if Thomistic considerations in the document are consciously complemented by more recent thought on the issue, and although the resulting eclecticism is in a certain way helpful in widening the horizon and anchoring the larger problematic in the thought of a normative figure in the theological tradition, such eclecticism is also disturbing because it lends some hidden incoherence to the argument. To all intents and purposes, while relying on key insights of the Thomistic account, the *Sensus Fidei* document develops a narrative that is implicitly governed by questions raised from the context of a different agenda.

Such a change of horizons is a natural outcome of the time-span which elapsed since Aquinas's Scholastic reflections and our own time where the rise of new challenges to theological reflection on the nature of faith and revelation and the internalisation of church teaching by the individual faithful requires a different approach. The replacement of Scholastic theocentric epistemology (where human intellectual activity is viewed as being enabled and inspired by God as its ultimate ground and teleological aim) by later anthropocentric subjectivist epistemologies in Enlightenment thought (which primarily focus on the knowing subject and its capacities to chart the laws operating in the world) heralds the rise of a new confidence in the power of the human cognitive faculties and a concomitant reflection on the significance of experience for human knowledge. The role of God in securing our knowledge of the world becomes less evident, at the same time the new questions

¹⁶ T. C. O'Brian, *Summa Theologiae*, vol. 31, 99, note 1.

of the historicity and evolution of knowledge and its situatedness in human experience come to the fore entailing, in turn, the question concerning the status of various forms of knowledge, such as, the one arising from affective experience. Joined to this problematic, the issue of the nature of faith must likewise be considered: is faith essentially rational, supra-rational, sub-rational, or counter-rational; is it based on intellectual assent or pre-reflective religious experience? A host of new issues come to the fore that cannot be sufficiently dealt with within the former metaphysical-epistemological scheme.

An interesting test-case for the confrontation of Thomistic thought with questions raised from a modern perspective can be found in the work of the Spanish Neo-Thomist theologian Francisco Marín-Sola OP (1873-1932), who reflects on the nature and possibility of the evolution of dogmas and within this context makes recourse to Aquinas's idea of connaturality.¹⁷ In his book titled *The Homogeneous Evolution of Catholic Dogma*,¹⁸ Marín-Sola takes up the challenge posed by Modernist authors who argue for the complete transformation of dogmatic church teaching during the centuries and who – within this context – emphasise the importance of the subjective appropriation of revealed dogmas identifying faith with affective religious experience. While – in the manner of Neo-Scholasticism – the Spanish theologian sets out to defend the traditional teaching concerning the intellectual nature of faith and revelation as an essentially divinely imparted set of truths, he nonetheless accepts the claims that dogmas develop over time and that they are not detached from Christian life experience bearing both on the process of dogmatic development and on the act of personal assent to them.¹⁹ What he actually does is to read Aquinas's theory of knowledge together with the Thomistic theology of grace through the spectacles of these modern concerns and bends the Scholastic account to make it a

¹⁷ I thank the anonymous reviewer of my manuscript for pointing out the connection with Marín-Solas's work in this context and for drawing my attention to John J. Burkhard's recently published seminal book on the history of the *sensus fidei*. See the section on Marín-Sola's contribution in John J. Burkhard OFM Conv, *The 'Sense of Faith' in History: Its Sources, Reception, and Theology* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2022), pp. 134-43. In my account of Marín-Sola's approach I also rely on the article of Allan A. Basas: 'A Man of Vision and Faithful Sentinel of Catholic Theology: Fr. Francisco Marín-Sola, O.P.', *Philippiniana Sacra* LVI: 171 (Special Issue – Part 2, 2021), pp. 1327-57, <https://philsacra.ust.edu.ph/admin/downloadarticle?id=82343C4A937CB0DE247A174F66FB6A79> (accessed: 22.09.2022.)

¹⁸ An expanded version of the original Spanish text (*La evolución homogénea del dogma católico*, 1923) was translated into French: *L'Évolution homogène du dogme catholique*, 2 vols., trans. Basile Cambou (Fribourg, CH: Imprimerie et Librairie de L'Oeuvre de Saint-Paul, 1924); an English translation: *The Homogeneous Evolution of Catholic Dogma*, trans. Antonio T. Piñon, O.P. (Manila, Philippines: Santo Tomas University Press, 1988).

¹⁹ Interestingly, as John J. Burkhard notes, in his account of the 'sense of the faith' Marín-Sola does not make mention of Newman's, Möhler's, or Scheeben's ideas. See Burkhard, *The 'Sense of Faith' in History*, p. 136, note 7.

suitable means for highlighting the way dogmatic formulations may be appropriated by the believing person and become embedded in his or her life experience. The question one may ask, though, is whether his attempt is really successful?

In his treatment of the ‘different paths of the evolution of dogma’ (in chapter 4 of his book) Marín-Sola identifies two ways of perceiving the content of dogmatic truths : one being the speculative way of discursive reasoning mediated through concepts, while the other being the affective or experiential way of immediate intuitive understanding where the ‘sense of the faith’ is eminently involved. Marín-Sola assigns the two ways to the two major Thomistic faculties: the speculative process of understanding belongs to the intellect, whereas the affective-intuitive mode is carried out within the purview of the will and he describes this latter with various expressions as ‘the way of the heart’, of feeling and experience, and even as of mystical experience claiming that it corresponds to the type of knowledge Aquinas terms knowledge by ‘connaturality,’ or ‘affinity’.

He finds the backdrop for the existence of such an affective way in Aquinas’s conception of divine epistemological gifts as grace, namely, the gifts of the Holy Spirit which help the believing person exceed the normal capacities of human knowledge, understanding and wisdom (forms of knowing hierarchically distinguished by Aquinas) and raise him or her to a higher level, beyond ordinary ways of knowing, where one receives a second (supernatural) nature which is connatural to God’s divine nature. Participation in such connaturality enables the person to arrive at truth by ways other than the rigorous steps of discursive reasoning, it allows for the immediate, intuitive and experiential grasp of divine realities. Marín-Sola holds that the ‘sense of the faith’ operates in the manner of knowledge by connaturality: under the impact of grace, it helps grasp truths in church teaching concerning God in an immediate experiential way and in this manner may disclose hidden or overlooked aspects of dogmatic teaching by sometimes even cutting the Gordian knot of intricate logical demonstration.²⁰

No matter how sophisticated and forward-looking at the time Marín-Sola’s account was, it nonetheless cannot adequately address the question of the relevance of Christian life-experience for the sense of the

²⁰ Burkhard notes that Marín-Sola quotes twenty-seven passages from the writings of Aquinas to substantiate his claim that Aquinas presupposes an alternative ‘affective way’ of coming to knowledge. See Burkhard, *The ‘Sense of Faith’ in History*, pp. 136-37. Burkhard quotes the following passage from Marín-Sola’s book (in his own translation based on the French edition): ‘In the matter of how the implicit truths of the revealed deposit of faith are penetrated, what differentiates the speculative way from the mystical is that the former only has study and reasoning at its disposal, whereas the latter also possesses grace and the gifts of the Holy Spirit that permit the believer to grasp in an experiential way a number of truths that are hidden from, or even completely ignored by, speculation or that are attained only after hard intellectual work’. Burkhard, *The ‘Sense of Faith’ in History*, p. 140.

faith. If the workings of such a sense are likened to mystical experience and the intuitive immediate grasp of God's reality, then the value of ordinary every day faith experience remains uncertain together with the issue concerning the mode of personal assent to the content of faith. Moreover, Aquinas's intellectualistic and hierarchical scheme of epistemology does not lend easy support for Marín-Sola's hypothesis that there are two complementary and equally valid ways to dogmatic truth, the speculative and the affective, and that these may work in relative independence from one another. The Thomistic framework proves unable to uphold the entire modern problematic of the sense of the faith, after all.²¹

This is tellingly illustrated by the fact that – in between references to Aquinas's works – the *Sensus Fidei* document makes recourse to other sources, such as, Johann Adam Möhler's *Symbolik*, suggesting that the *sensus fidei fidelis* functions in the mode of a vital feeling for the truth of faith: '[a]s its name (*sensus*) indicates, it is akin rather to a natural, immediate and spontaneous reaction, and comparable to a vital instinct or a sort of "flair" by which the believer clings spontaneously to what conforms to the truth of faith and shuns what is contrary to it'.²² As becomes clear from the footnote quoting Möhler's own phrasing, he uses the term '*ein tiefes, sicher führendes Gefühl*' (a deep and safely guiding feeling) to characterise the activity of the Holy Spirit, who implants in members of the Church an acute sense, a trustworthy feeling for the truth.²³

One may wonder if Aquinas's intellectualist account is inherently combined here with a post-Enlightenment, anti-rationalist agenda which aims to establish feeling/sensibility/affectivity as an alternative source of knowledge over against the conceptual reflection provided by reason.²⁴ This agenda works with a thin concept of rationality based on the model of modern scientific knowledge: reason in this framework is directed to what is objectively graspable; it is seen as working with well-definable concepts and proceeding by discursive and verifiable steps. Such a thin concept of reason excludes the intuitive and

²¹ Notably, the *Sensus Fidei* document makes no mention of Marín-Sola's account.

²² SF 54. The document quotes the following idea from Möhler: 'Der göttliche Geist, welchem die Leitung und Belebung der Kirche anvertraut ist, wird in seiner Vereinigung mit dem menschlichen ein eigenthümlich christlicher Tact, ein tiefes, sicher führendes Gefühl, das, wie er in der Wahrheit steht, auch aller Wahrheit entgegenleitet'. C. J. A. Möhlen, *Symbolik*, §38.

²³ The document refers to Möhler, Newman, and Perrone previous to this section, in the part treating the development of the concept *sensus fidei* during the nineteenth century, and it characterises Möhler's project as one directed to defend the Catholic faith against rationalism. SF 35.

²⁴ On the dissociation between reason and sensibility, see Beáta Tóth, "'Our Most Serious Deficiency-Disease': Reason, Faith and the Rediscovery of Sensibility", *New Blackfriars* 90 (2009), pp. 718–37.

affective dimensions of human knowledge, relegating them to an alternative ‘faculty’ which, since Pascal, has emblematically been termed the ‘heart’, apparent also from his famous dictum that the heart can have its own reasons that are unknown to reason itself.²⁵ The heart is considered to be the seat of the non-discursive, the vital and the emotional. The former ordered anthropological model where a hierarchical, yet at the same time co-operative interaction is posited between the intellect and the intuitive-affective lower functions of the human soul, is turned into a unilevel and bi-polar dichotomy between reason on the one hand, and all other functions which are regarded as differing from rationality on the other.

There are several indications in the document that seem to be pointing in the direction of this kind of bi-polar anthropological scheme. The *sensus fidei fidelium* appears here as an alternative mode of knowledge described by way of a contrast to scientific rationality. For example, its principal manifestations in the individual believer are portrayed with terms usually applied to the workings of the intellect. It is said to enable one to ‘discern whether or not a particular teaching or practice [...] is coherent with the true faith’; it is supposed to help one ‘distinguish in what is preached between the essential and the secondary’; and it is also thought to enlighten one in determining and putting into practice ‘the witness to Jesus Christ that [one] should give in the particular historical and cultural context in which [one lives]’ (SF 60). As a ‘personal aptitude of the believer to make an accurate discernment in matters of faith’ (SF3), the *sensus fidei fidelium* appears as having the characteristics of rational reflection.

Called ‘knowledge of the heart’, (SF 50) it is not so much understood in scriptural terms as being situated at the synthetic centre of the human person, where cognitive, volitional, and affective functions converge, but is rather conceived in a Pascalian manner as complementing the weaknesses of reason and counterbalancing excessive rationality. The idea of heart, too, equivocates in the document between the scriptural meaning and an anti-rationalist sense.

All in all, there is one lesson to learn from our short inquiry into the *Sensus Fidei* document: one cannot face the problem of defining the ways such *sensus* functions in the believing person, without undertaking the laborious job of constructing an adequate epistemological framework where the status of affective/instinctive/immediate knowledge is defined with regard to its relation to speculative forms of knowing.²⁶ Our aim in this short survey can but be modest. Setting up a

²⁵ Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, tr. F. W. Trotter (New York: Collier & Son, 1909), (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Christian Classics Ethereal Library) fr. 277. <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/pascal/pensees.pdf> (accessed 10.06.2022.)

²⁶ In his comprehensive study of various conceptions of the ‘sense of the faith’, John J. Burkhard outlines the contours of a possible future epistemology which views knowledge

diagnosis is certainly easier than finding a remedy; however, it may serve as the first step towards a better understanding of the nature of the sense of the faith and its situatedness in the life-experience and reflective discernment of the human person.

Beáta Tóth
Sapientia College of Theology, Budapest

toth.beata@sapientia.hu

as a continuum of phases of cognition in a multifaceted manner where each phase is part of a 'continuing series of complementary acts', and none of them attains to the entirety of truth. Within this scheme there are 'objective' and 'participatory' forms of knowledge, and the 'sense of the faith' belongs to the latter since it is knowledge obtained through trust and the acceptance of a religious reality and through participation in the experience of Christian practice. See Burkhard, *The 'Sense of Faith' in History*, pp. 377-79.